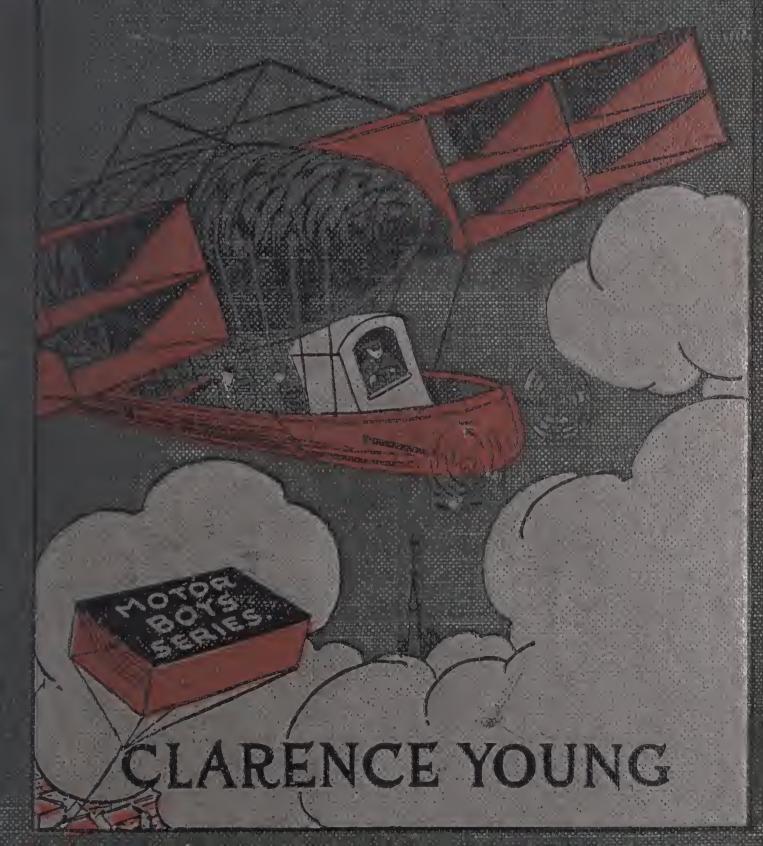
THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN





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"SAFE!" CRIED JERRY, AND THERE WAS A BREATH OF RELIEF FROM ALL ON BOARD.

THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN

Or

A Marvelous Rescue in Mid-Air

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR BOYS," "THE MOTOR BOYS AFLOAT," "THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS," "JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL DAYS,"

"JACK RANGER'S TREASURE BOX," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN

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PREFACE

DEAR BOYS:

It hardly seems possible that I have written as many as eleven volumes of this series, yet such is the case. The present book is just one short of a dozen, and if you are pleased with this, perhaps I shall be encouraged to write the twelfth book.

As for the present volume, I have endeavored to give you in it a stirring account of what happened to Jerry, Ned and Bob after they had started out on an apparently simple errand to see a certain man.

Ned Slade's father was in business trouble, and the lad and his friends volunteered to ask aid from a Mr. Jackson. They started out to find him, only to learn that he had gone to a balloon carnival, as he was interested in air craft. The boys went to the aviation meet, and arrived just as Mr. Jackson went up in his big dirigible balloon. Instead of coming back, as he was expected to do, the millionaire sent a wireless mes-

PREFACE

sage stating that he and his friends were being blown out to sea in a hurricane.

He asked for help, and our heroes, in their airship, the Comet, started out over the ocean to the rescue. How they accomplished it, the perils they ran, the dangers from the escaping gas, and how they brought Mr. Jackson and his unconscious crew over a narrow plank, high above the ocean, into their own craft, you will find told of in this book.

I venture to hope that you will like this book as well as you have those in the past, for that will encourage me to write others for you.

Sincerely yours,

CLARENCE YOUNG.

THE MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN

CHAPTER I

NED IS WORRIED

"WELL, Chunky, what do you think of the idea?"

"Oh, I don't know, Jerry. It seems as if it might be a good one, but we've got a fine air-ship now, and it would be a pity to spoil it."

"Who said anything about spoiling it?" demanded Jerry Hopkins, in rather indignant tones, as he looked across the table at his chum, Bob Baker, whose stoutness had gained him the nickname of Chunky. "Who wants to spoil the Comet, you old calamity howler?"

"Well, aren't you talking of ripping it apart and putting some new-fangled attachment on it? I say let well enough alone."

"Say, if everybody was like you, Bob, there

wouldn't be much done in this world. 'Let well enough alone!' If Columbus had said that, America would never have been discovered."

"Oh, get out!"

"No, I'll not. Here I come and propose a good improvement for our air-ship, something that will make it possible to do stunts over water, and you sit down on it!"

"What, sit on the water?" asked Bob, with a mischievous grin. "You know I never was much good at floating, Jerry."

"Oh, cut it out! Now be serious if it's possible. Honestly, what do you think of the idea? Look at the illustration there. It shows a fellow in an aeroplane getting his start on the water instead of on land, and rising up in the air. The article says that by means of the hydroplanes it is possible for an aeroplane to also land on the water and float. Now what I want to do is to attach hydroplanes to our *Comet*. How about it?"

"Gee! Anybody'd think you were delivering a lecture on aeronautics, Jerry! But, as I said, I don't know what to say. You sprang this thing on me so suddenly. I'd like a chance to think it over."

"Think it over! Why, it oughtn't to take long

to decide on a feature like this. Our air-ship is old-fashioned now. We've had it quite a while, and you know there has been a big advance made among the birdmen lately. Hydroplanes are the latest idea, and I say we ought to put them on the Comet, and also make other improvements. But I can't do it unless you and Ned agree, as we each own a third interest in our air-ship."

"That's so. I wonder where Ned is?" and Bob looked out of the window, hoping he might see the third member of the motor boys' trio. "Didn't you meet him on your way over to my house, Jerry?"

"No. I stopped for him, but his mother said he was down at his father's department store. Say, I shouldn't be surprised but what there was some trouble in the Slade family, Bob."

"Why?" asked the stout youth, his attention temporarily taken off the subject of air-ships by the serious tone in which his chum spoke. "What makes you think that, Jerry?"

"Because Mrs. Slade looked worried, and, come to think of it, Ned hasn't been around much with us lately. He's been down in the store a number of nights, helping his father on the books, he said. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if there was some trouble in the business."

"I hope not. But I wish Ned were here to help settle this question."

"It won't take long to settle it when he does come," retorted Jerry, rising and going over to the window, where he could get a better light on a magazine he had brought so that he too might show his chum some new ideas regarding air navigation. "I know Ned will agree with me," went on the tall lad, "and you will be the obstructing party."

"Well, large bodies move slowly, you know, Jerry. It takes me some time to make up my mind. Just what do you want to do to the Comet, anyhow? Put in a new steam-heating apparatus, or add a gymnasium, and shower-baths, and elevators?"

"Oh, don't get funny, Bob! I'm serious. What I want to do is to add the hydroplane feature. That's the biggest improvement, though there are several smaller ones to be put in. But it won't be much work to attach the hydroplanes. All we need to do is to build on some air-tight floats, or boxes, which will do on the water exactly what the bicycle wheels of an aeroplane do on land—support it. Then, in case we have an accident, say over the ocean, we can just drop down, and float until we make repairs. Or, for

that matter we can swim along on the water."

"Why, you don't expect to go over the ocean, do you?"

"No, but you never can tell what you want to do," declared Jerry, "and the hydroplanes might be very useful some day."

The time was to come, and that not far distant, when Jerry's prediction was to bear fruit.

"Well, I'm not in favor of ripping the good old Comet too much apart," declared Bob firmly. "She carried us many a mile, and did good service. Why, look at all we did in her. Look what a help she was in rescuing those poor people from the valley, when Professor Snodgrass got his flying lizard."

"That's all true, but if we have a motor-ship that can go on the water, the professor can get a flying fish, or something like that, in case he goes along with us on the next trip."

"Oh, he'll go all right enough," spoke Bob, with a laugh. "Dear old professor! We wouldn't know how to get along without him, though he sometimes does the oddest things."

"You're getting away from the main discussion," said Jerry. "What about making the changes?"

"I'm not exactly in favor of them!" remarked

Bob, after a moment's thought. "The Comet was always good enough for us as she is, and why change her?"

"Oh, you and your 'good enough'!" burst out Jerry. "Why don't you have some progressive spirit in you?"

"I have, only I don't want to spoil a good thing and—"

"Hello! Here comes Ned, now!" interrupted Jerry, looking out on the porch, the steps of which a youth was at that moment ascending.

"Well, we'll see what he says," remarked Bob.
"I'll wager that he'll agree with me."

"No, he'll say that I'm right," came from Jerry. "I'll let him in."

Jerry was so eager to hear what the new-comer would say, and Bob, because of his fleshy build, was so slow in getting up that the tall lad was at the front door before the young host had reached the portal, and had admitted Ned Slade.

"Just in time, Ned!" greeted Jerry. "You have the deciding vote."

"What about?" asked Ned, and his chums were at once aware of a change in his manner. He spoke listlessly, and as if he was little interested. He seemed tired out, too, as if he had

been working too hard, and yet it was only the beginning of the summer vacation.

"It's about our motor-ship," began Jerry.

"He wants to cut her all up, put on racing skates, or water shoes, or something like that, and add a lot of improvements," broke in Bob, with a grin at his tall chum.

"Hydroplanes! hydroplanes! not water shoes, you old backwoodsman!" cried Jerry. "Here, Ned, let me explain," and with that the tall lad launched into a lively description of the proposed changes, with Bob interrupting every now and then with an objection, or with some queer comment.

While the boys are thus engaged, I will take a moment to tell you something about them, for, though many of my readers are well acquainted with the motor lads, some of my new friends may never have been introduced to them.

The three chums were Jerry Hopkins, son of a widow, Mrs. Julia Hopkins; Bob Baker, whose father, Mr. Andrew Baker, was a wealthy banker; and Ned Slade, son of Aaron Slade, proprietor of a large department store.

The chums lived in Cresville, not far from Boston, and they had gained the title "Motor Boys"

from the fact that they had been associated with motor vehicles for a long time.

Their early adventures on bicycles were told of in the first volume of this series, entitled, "The Motor Boys." Later they got motor-cycles, and soon after that an automobile. In this machine they made a long trip overland, taking with them a certain Professor Uriah Snodgrass, a learned scientist, who was always searching for some queer bug, reptile, or butterfly.

The boys went to Mexico, discovered a buried city, and returned across the plains, and later they purchased a motor-boat.

In this fine craft, named the *Dartaway*, they had many adventures, not a few of which are set down in the fifth volume of the series called "The Motor Boys Afloat." They made a long trip on the Atlantic, and during the following vacation had some surprising adventures in the Everglades of Florida. Some time later they made a voyage on the Pacific ocean in search of a mysterious derelict. On this and on other trips they had much trouble from a bully, Noddy Nixon, and his crony, Bill Berry.

By this time the conquest of the air was well under way, and it might have been expected that our heroes would take part in it. They built an air-ship, with the aid of a Mr. Glassford, and a wonderful craft it was. Christened the Comet, their motor-ship was a combination of a dirigible balloon and an aeroplane. That is, there was a gas bag, which alone would support the machine in air, and there were also side planes, which were of service in case of accident to the gas bag.

In the book called "The Motor Boys in the Clouds," the air-ship is fully described, so I will not take up space here to give the details of its construction. Sufficient to say that it was capable of long flights; it had a powerful motor and other machinery, and there was a roomy cabin in which the travellers of the air could live in comfort. Large propellers enabled the *Comet* to travel at a good speed.

Aboard her the boys had some exciting times, and in the book named "The Motor Boys Over the Rockies," they were the means of rescuing a party of white men and women who had long been held in captivity by a band of Indians.

Returning from this trip, on which they were accompanied by Professor Snodgrass, our friends resumed their studies, and, now that winter was over, and vacation at hand, they were planning for new adventures.

As has just been told, Jerry Hopkins had called

on his chum Bob to propose certain changes in the Comet.

"Well, what do you think of my scheme?" asked the widow's son, as he finished explaining to Ned.

"Oh, I don't know," was Ned's rather listless answer.

"Oh, for cats' sake!" cried Jerry. "Don't be as Bob was! Say something, even if you don't agree with me. If both of you are down on the idea, that settles it, and we'll leave the *Comet* as she is."

"That's what I say!" remarked Bob.

"Let's hear what Ned has to propose," suggested the tall lad. He looked at his other chum, but Ned appeared strangely indifferent. He sat looking out of the window, his thoughts apparently elsewhere.

"Well, what about it, Ned?" asked Jerry, after a pause.

"About what?" inquired Ned, with a start.

"Why, this air-ship!" exclaimed Jerry, in some surprise. "Haven't you been listening to what I've said?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't paid much attention," admitted Ned.

"What's the matter?" demanded Bob. "Are you in trouble, Ned?"

"Well, no, not exactly," and Ned spoke slowly. "That is, I'm not, but dad—— Oh, I forgot. I'm not supposed to tell," and once more Ned gazed gloomily out of the window.

"Look here, Ned," spoke Jerry softly. "I didn't mean to inflict this talk on you when you've got other things to think about."

"Oh, that's all right, Jerry."

"And if there's anything Bob or I can do-"

"Of course," broke in the fat lad. "Can't we help you, Ned?"

"Well, I don't know. Dad doesn't want it talked about, though it's bound to come out soon, anyhow, I guess. If I tell you fellows it won't go any further, will it?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Jerry and Bob together.

"I needn't have asked that; I might have known it wouldn't," said Ned. "Well, the truth of it is that dad's business is in bad shape."

"Do you mean that he is going to fail?" asked Jerry.

"Well, it might amount to that, though we hope to stave it off. I've been helping him on his

books lately, that's what makes me so tired. I've been up late for several nights. The business is in fairly good shape, and can be made better if we could do certain things."

"What are they?" asked Bob.

"It's too complicated to go much into detail over," explained Ned, "but, in brief, it's this: Certain opposition to dad's department-store business is being organized by a powerful syndicate. Now, if dad could get the help and co-operation of a certain man, everything would be all right."

"Who is the man?" asked Jerry.

"His name is Mr. Wescott Jackson. He once was in great trouble, and my father aided him. Dad knows that if he could get into communication with this man he would be only too glad to help him, lend him his influence, and all that, and then the business wouldn't suffer."

"Well, why doesn't he ask aid of this Mr. Jackson, then, Ned?" inquired Jerry.

"He'd be only too glad to, but he can't locate him. And, another thing, dad's enemies are interested in keeping Mr. Jackson away from father. That is, they don't want dad to get word to him of his trouble. So that complicates matters. If I could only talk to Mr. Jackson, and get his sig-

nature to certain documents, everything would be all right."

"Well, why can't you?" asked Bob.

"I don't know where to look for Mr. Jackson."

"Say! we've done harder things than that!" cried Jerry suddenly. "What's the matter with the three of us having a hunt for this Mr. Jackson? Can't we aid you, Ned?"

"I only wish you could."

"We can!" declared the tall youth, with energy. "Bob—Ned! We'll let the air-ship go for a while, and we'll devote all our energies to finding Mr. Jackson. What do you say, Bob?"

"I'm with you from the drop of the hat!"

"Good! Then, Ned, you can consider that your father's troubles, and yours, too, are in a fair way to be settled when the Motor Boys get on the trail," and the tall lad clapped his chum on the back with hearty good-will.

CHAPTER II

NEWS OF MR. JACKSON

"You feel better already, don't you, Ned?" asked Jerry a little later, following a brisk discussion of the possible plans for locating Mr. Jackson.

"I believe I do," answered the son of the department-store proprietor. "It's always a relief to be busy when you have trouble, for it takes it off your mind."

"Yes, and we'll find that Mr. Jackson, too," declared Bob, with energy.

"I hope so," added Ned. "But now, what about this new hydroplane business, Jerry? I can listen now with some attention since I've told you what was on my mind."

"Good! Then I hope you'll agree with me," and Jerry proceeded to describe in detail what he proposed doing.

Ned listened attentively, and asked several questions, showing that he understood the plan proposed by his chum.

"Now then, Ned, are you with me or against me?" demanded Jerry, at length.

"Against him!" put in Bob eagerly. "Don't let him spoil the Comet!"

"I'll not spoil her," cried Jerry. "Let Ned speak for himself, Chunky."

"Then I'm for it!" exclaimed Ned, with sudden energy. "It's quite a radical change, but I think it will be a good one. We may want to make a trip over water, but until I can help out my father I'm not going to do much else, so I can't be of any aid to you, Jerry."

"Oh, that's all right. We have all summer to make the changes in, and Bob and I can be doing part of it at odd times, while you're working with your father on the books. Of course, I mean when we're not looking for Mr. Jackson; eh, Bob?"

"Do you think I'm going to help?" demanded the stout lad.

"Well, you're in the minority, and you always said the majority ought to govern. We're two to your one."

"Oh, all right, go ahead!" exclaimed Bob, with a gesture of despair. "Put a bath-room in the Comet if you like, and I suppose I'll have to stand for it."

"No, you can lie down when you take a bath," observed Ned, with a grin, and his chums laughed, taking it as a sign that the lad was forgetting some of his worries.

"Then we'll go ahead when we get the chance," observed Jerry. "But now let's go down to your father's store, Ned, and tell him we are on the job."

"And get some idea of where to hunt for this mysterious Mr. Jackson," suggested Bob.

"Sure—yes," agreed Jerry.

"Oh, I don't know that he's so mysterious," remarked Ned. "It's only that he is a very busy man, and has so many interests—railroads, mines, ships, building canals and trolley lines—so many irons in the fire, that he may be in New York one day, and off for London or San Francisco the next. That's why he's so hard to get hold of.

"Then, too, he's interested in some kind of sport, I heard dad say. Yachting or motoring or something like that, I can't just remember, and he's likely to be off on a trip. Even his secretary doesn't know where to find him sometimes, and when you stop to consider that the men who are working against my father have some interests in common with Mr. Jackson, and don't want him to know of my father's trouble, you

can see that it's going to be no easy proposition."

"Wouldn't a letter reach him?" inquired Bob, as he got ready to accompany his chums out of the house.

"We've tried letters and telegrams," explained Ned. "None of them are any good. I heard dad say that sometimes letters follow Mr. Jackson half way around the globe, and even then he doesn't get them. Oh, he's a hard man to get in touch with!"

"But we'll do it!" declared Jerry, when they were on their way to the department store.

Mr. Slade was both surprised and pleased when his son, and the latter's two chums, came into the office, and Ned had explained the decision at which they had arrived.

"Boys!" exclaimed the merchant, "I don't know how to thank you for your offer. I needn't say that it is going to be quite a task, for Ned has explained what a peculiar man Mr. Jackson is, but I like your spirit. I knew you and Ned were quite chummy, and had been through lots of adventure together, but I never imagined that you'd prove a friend to the older folks in the family.

"It is certainly very good of you, and I appreciate it more than I can tell. I'm afraid, though, that it will break up your vacation plans."

"Not at all," Jerry assured Mr. Slade. "We may get more fun out of hunting for Mr. Jackson than you imagine. We'll try for him in the auto, and if that doesn't catch him we'll get after him in the motor boat, and as a last resort—"

"The airship, with the new hydroplane feature!" put in Ned with a laugh.

"Exactly," agreed Jerry. "But, Mr. Slade, if we are to find this odd man, we ought to have something to work on. Where was he located last?"

"Out in San Francisco," was the reply. "But where he went from there no one seems to know. He started East to inspect a new railroad he is building, and from then on all trace of him has been lost. I have agents in various parts of the country trying to get a trace of him, but so far—"

Mr. Slade was interrupted by the sudden ringing of the telephone bell. He swung around to his desk, in the private office where the talk was taking place, and unhooked the receiver. The boys listened to the one-sided conversation.

"Yes—yes," said Mr. Slade eagerly. "What's that? He is? Are you sure it's the same man? In Boston, you say—No, just outside—what's that? The name of the place is Durham? Yes, I get it. Oh, say, I'm ever so much obliged to

you, Burkhardt. Yes, I'll get right after him. In fact, I have some friends of mine here in the office now who are anxious to start off on the quest. Yes, they're friends of Ned. Good-bye!"

Mr. Slade turned to the three chums.

"Boys!" he cried, "I have a trace of Mr. Jackson. He was in Boston yesterday, and is now stopping at a health resort in Durham, resting up after a hard business campaign."

"In Durham!" cried Jerry. "That's not far from here. We could do it in one day in the auto! We're on his trail at last! Come on, fellows, let's get ready for the trip!"

CHAPTER III

THE PROFESSOR'S QUEST

THE good news of the location of Mr. Jackson was so unexpected, that, for a few moments the little party in Mr. Slade's office hardly knew how to take it. Then they all began talking at once, at least the boys did, until the merchant, with a laugh, remarked that they were making so much noise that the clerks would think something serious had happened. This quieted the three chums.

"Well, we'd better get started," urged Jerry. "Mr. Jackson may get away from Durham any minute."

"Oh, I don't believe he's as bad as that," ventured Mr. Slade. "If he's there for his health he'll be likely to remain for some time. I'd go see him myself, but I dare not leave my business at this critical juncture."

"Oh, we're only too glad to try and get into touch with him for you," asserted Bob. "How

can we tell him if we meet him? Does Ned know him?"

"No," answered Mr. Slade's son. "I never saw him, but dad has his picture."

"Then we can take that along, and do a little detective work," suggested Jerry. "We'll inquire for a Mr. Jackson, and if he's like the picture he'll be our man."

"I'm afraid the photograph wouldn't be of great help," said Mr. Slade. "It was taken a number of years ago, and I fancy Mr. Jackson has changed much in that time. However, I can describe him to you, and give you a letter to him, and that may answer. As I said, I ought really to go myself, but if I left here, my enemies would only make more trouble for me. Mr. Jackson is the only man who can help me."

There was more talk, and Mr. Slade gave his son and the latter's chums some directions as to how to proceed. He also made out certain documents, which, if Mr. Jackson would sign, would end the department store troubles.

"Now to get our auto in shape!" exclaimed Jerry as they prepared to leave the store. "I hope we can get some speed out of the machine without too much tinkering."

"We'll give it a try-out," decided Bob. "Take

a little run this afternoon, and see how she works."

The car the boys now owned was not the one they had had originally. It was a more powerful machine, though so interested had our friends been in airship matters of late, that they had not given their auto much use.

That afternoon saw the three chums speeding down a quiet highway that led out of Cresville. The auto ran well, but they discovered a few defects and arranged to have them remedied at a garage.

"Then we'll start for Durham the first thing to-morrow, fellows!" cried Bob enthusiastically. "Say, it's fun to be doing something again. It's like old times!"

"It sure is," agreed Jerry. "Can't you put on a little more speed, Ned?" For the merchant's son was at the wheel. "Cut out the muffler, and use the accelerator pedal more. Make believe we're after Noddy Nixon, and that he's getting away from us. We may need speed if we have to race after Mr. Jackson."

They were ascending a hill, and Ned had turned on all the power he dared use, when, as he swung around a bend, a small man suddenly darted out right in front of the machine. "Look out!" yelled Jerry, leaning forward and grasping the laprobe rail in front of him.

"Jam on the brakes! Toot your horn!" cried Bob.

Ned did not answer. He had instinctively done three things, blown the horn, jammed on the foot and emergency hand brake, and had turned to one side. He also gave a loud yell.

But the man who had so suddenly brought about this commotion, paid not the least attention to the trouble he had caused. With a small net on the end of a long pole, extended in front of him, he was chasing a brilliant little red butterfly, which was flitting along, all unconscious of the danger so close to him.

Suddenly the net went down with a swoop, and the butterfly was out of sight.

"I got him! I got him! I have the little beauty! One of the rarest butterflies in this section of the country! It's worth fifty dollars if it's worth a cent! Oh, you little darling, I have you!" And the man went down on his hands and knees to get the prize from under the net.

"Well, wouldn't that make you—" began Ned, as he eased up on his foot pressure, and shut off the power.

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What he started to say he never finished, for Jerry cried out:

"If that isn't Professor Uriah Snodgrass, I'll drink a pint of gasolene!"

"Eh? What's that? Were you calling me?" asked the little man in a mild voice, looking up sideways from his kneeling position on the ground. "Who wants Professor Snodgrass?" he inquired, peering through his spectacles.

Then he caught sight of the boys, who were alighting from the car. Over his face there came a smile of welcome. He got up, holding in a section of the net, carefully gathered up in his fingers, the red butterfly.

"Well of all the good luck!" cried the professor. "Here I meet my friends the motor boys again, when I least expect it. One moment, my dear boys, until I have put this specimen safely away, and I'll be with you. Well, of all the strange and remarkable coincidences! I was just thinking of you, when I saw this butterfly dart out of the bushes, and of course, I took after it."

"And nearly made an end to your collecting fad forever," said Jerry.

"How's that?" asked the professor.

"We nearly ran you down," explained Bob.

"Oh, that? A mere trifle!" said the odd little scientist. "I run chances like that half a dozen times a day. I would risk almost anything for such a specimen. And what would I not risk if I could find the prize I am after?"

"Are you after something new?" asked Bob, as he watched Mr. Snodgrass carefully put away in the cyanide bottle the red butterfly.

"Yes, something very new," answered Mr. Snodgrass. "I have been commissioned by the museum, for which I collect specimens, to get them a singing fish."

"A singing fish?" cried Ned, thinking it was a joke.

"A singing fish," replied the scientist. "That is, it does not exactly sing, but when taken from the water it makes a peculiar sound. It is said to be the only fish that does this. But, in addition, it has the power of flying for short distances out of the water, and it can also swell itself up to about twice its natural size. So you see it is a very valuable specimen to get, and very, very rare."

"But you can't find it on land," objected Jerry. "No, my dear boy," admitted the professor, as

he shook hands with his friends, "but I expect to

shortly make a trip on the ocean. Then I hope to get my singing fish. I wish you boys were going on some voyage, and I could go with you."

"We are going on a trip, but it's mostly a land trip," explained Ned. "We may use the airship, though. It all depends; and if Jerry carries out his plans, and attaches the hydroplanes, we might make a sea trip, but that's all in the air as yet. We're looking for a certain man."

"And I'm searching for a rare fish," went on the scientist. "At odd times I collect whatever specimens come in my way."

"What are you doing in this part of the country?" asked Ned. "I thought you were in Boston."

"So I am, but I heard of a man out this way who knows the habits of the singing fish, and I want to get some information from him. So I came on, and, as the man was not at home I improved my opportunity by strolling out into the country to see what I could find.

"I have been very fortunate; I find the red butterfly, and I meet my former friends. Both are most delightful surprises. But, may I ask, who is the man you are seeking?"

"Mr. Wescott Jackson," answered Ned, after a moment's hesitation.

"Wescott Jackson! Not the wealthy promoter?" cried Professor Snodgrass.

"That's the man," declared Jerry.

"Well, if that isn't odd!" exclaimed the scientist. "Why I know him. In fact, he and I are great friends. He is one of the trustees of the museum where I am employed, and I once did him a great favor, in getting him a certain old rare Aztec altar, for he collects antiques. Yes, I know Mr. Jackson quite well."

"Then you are the very man for us!" cried Ned in great delight. "Here, we can't lose sight of you. Hop into the auto, professor. You help us locate Mr. Jackson, and we'll help you get the singing fish! Is that a bargain?"

Mr. Snodgrass gazed through his spectacles at the boys for a moment.

"It is!" he exclaimed suddenly, as he got up into the auto; and Ned started off the machine.

CHAPTER IV

NODDY NIXON MAKES TROUBLE

"HOLD on a moment, boys! Stop the car. Jam on the emergency brake, or whatever you call it. I must get out! Quick!"

Thus cried Professor Snodgrass about half an hour after he had entered the auto with the boys.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ned, doing as requested, and bringing the machine to a sudden stop. "Have you lost your hat, Professor?"

"Easy now! Don't talk or move! Keep perfectly quiet!" Speaking in a whisper, the scientist slid from his seat with his small butterfly net in his hand. Gliding forward like a hunter intent on making a shot at big game, the little man, his eyes fairly glaring through his spectacles, made his way cautiously to a small bush beside the roadway.

"What's he after now?" asked Jerry with a hopeless look at his companions.

"I don't know. A new kind of five-legged bug or a reddish-green hoptoad," whispered back Bob,

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for, though they were very fond of their friend the professor, they could not help, at times, cracking jokes concerning his pursuit after his quarry.

"Please don't make a move!" called the scientist to the boys, without looking around. "I'll have the beauty in a moment now!"

"If he keeps this up," commented Ned, "we'll never get to Durham in time to catch Mr. Jackson."

"That's so," agreed Bob.

"But we need the professor's help," argued Jerry, "and if he knows Mr. Jackson, the latter may receive us better than he would if we came alone, and he may sign the papers more readily, Ned."

"In that case I'll stop the machine at every milepost, and let the professor catch bugs to his heart's content," declared the merchant's son, for he was very much in earnest in his efforts to aid his father.

"Ah! There he is! I have him!" suddenly exclaimed the professor, as he made a swoop with his net. The next minute he was holding a small portion of the flimsy cloth in his fingers, and inspecting at close range some fluttering captive.

"What is it?" called Jerry.

"Is it a valuable specimen?" Bob wanted to know.

"It's a three-winged—oh, pshaw! No, it isn't either! I've made a mistake!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass in disappointed tones. "It's not the kind I want at all—they're too common," and with a sigh he opened the net and let fly out some sort of a bug or insect.

"What was the trouble?" asked Ned, as he started the motor on the spark, and waited for the professor to retake his seat.

"I thought I had a three-winged dragon-fly," replied the professor. "I caught a glimpse of him perched on a bush as we were dashing by, but when I had him in the net I saw that he had four wings, and was of the ordinary variety. A three-winged dragon-fly would be a rarity, and worth considerable, but the ones with four wings are worthless. Well, better luck next time," and with that the scientist got in, and the auto was started.

Mr. Snodgrass once more began eagerly to scan the bushes on either side of the road, hoping for a sight of some other prize in the insect line, while the boys talked among themselves about the prospects of meeting Mr. Jackson.

"Are you sure you are ready to go off with us on a trip, Professor?" asked Jerry, when he and his chums had spoken of the possibility of making a voyage in the motorship. "We can't tell where we'll end up in this chase, though."

"I'll go anywhere you go," was the quick reply, but the little man never took his eyes off the bushes, for he was ever on the alert for specimens.

They rode forward for some time longer, thoroughly enjoying the trip, and then, as it was getting late and they wanted to take the car to the garage to have it put in shape for the trip to Durham the following day, they turned back, and made a quick run to Cresville.

"Good luck!" called Mr. Slade after the party as the auto chugged off the next morning, the professor being on hand early.

They were to be gone at least three days, for it would take one day to go to Durham, another, or perhaps two, to negotiate with Mr. Jackson, provided they could find him, and still another day to come home. They would put up at a hotel in the meanwhile.

It was a fine day, the auto was in good shape, and, on the hard roads they made good time. Of course Professor Snodgrass was ready with his net, and on the lookout for any prizes he might spy, but the boys hoped he would not stop too often, and delay them.

They had covered perhaps thirty miles, and were bowling along at fast speed, Mr. Snodgrass being a little disappointed that he had not seen anything worth capturing, when, as they swung around a turn in the road, they saw, just ahead of them, a place where a ditch was being dug along the highway, to allow the laying of pipes. Dirt had been thrown up on either side of the road, leaving only a narrow path for the auto to pass through.

"Look out for that spot, Jerry," called Ned to the tall lad, who was steering.

"All right," was the ready response, and the speed of the car was somewhat checked.

"Can you make it?" asked Bob. "It looks pretty narrow to me."

"Oh, I'll do it," answered Jerry, but, as he came nearer, and saw how very narrow the opening was, he brought the car to a stop. "Whoever did this excavating had lots of nerve to take up so much of the road," he went on, as he got out to measure the space more carefully. "They've gone off and left it, and I don't see any signs that they have lights here at night. It would be a bad place to get to after dark."

While he was looking at the obstruction they were all startled by hearing the sound of an auto

horn, blown with an energy and persistence that seemed to be a protest at their occupancy of the road.

"Some one's in a hurry," commented Ned, and, looking down the road, in the direction in which they were going, they saw coming toward them an auto containing two figures. It advanced swiftly.

"Hold on! Look out! Stop!" yelled Jerry, holding up a warning hand. "I don't believe there's room to pass!"

In spite of his injunction the other machine came on until, the occupants getting near enough to see the narrow pass, they brought the car to an abrupt stop. When it halted the three motor boys uttered a simultaneous exclamation at the sight of the occupants of the car.

"Noddy Nixon!" gasped Ned, and his chums echoed his words.

"Well, what of it?" snarled the bully. "Isn't this a free country? Can't I go where I like?"

They did not take the trouble to answer him, but gazed at the man seated beside him.

"Bill Berry," murmured Jerry. "Here's a fine chance for trouble, and I shouldn't be surprised if we got some of it."

"Back up your car, and let me pass!" insolently

demanded Noddy, as he prepared to throw in his gears and start ahead. So close was the vehicle of our friends to the narrow passage that there was not room for the other car to get by. "Back up!" went on the bully. "What right have you to block the highway?"

"The same right that you have!" fired back Jerry. "We don't want to block it up, but we were here first, and it's your place to reverse and let us past."

"Reverse nothing!" muttered Bill Berry. "Run 'em down, Noddy, if they won't let you by."

"I will!" declared the bully. "You'd better back up!" he called out, threateningly.

"Don't give in to him," urged Ned in a low voice to his tall chum.

"I'm not going to," answered Jerry.

"Isn't there room for us to pass him?" inquired Bob, for Noddy's car was a little farther back from the obstruction than was that of our heroes. "I think you can make it."

"It's a pretty tight squeeze, but I'll chance it if I have to."

"Well, are you going to back up, and let me pass?" demanded Noddy again. "You'd better or I'll smash into you!"

"Just try it!" retorted Jerry, a flush mounting

to his cheeks. "It'll be the last smash you ever make!"

"Why don't you be decent, Noddy?" asked Ned, in what was intended to be conciliatory tones. "You can back up easier than we can; and besides, we were here first. Why don't you do it?"

"Because I don't want to. I'm in a hurry."

"So are we," said Ned, as he thought of the necessity for seeing Mr. Jackson.

"Come on," spoke Jerry in a low voice to his chums as he turned to reënter the car, for they had all left it, including Mr. Snodgrass, who was eagerly looking about in the bushes for some rare insect. "Get back to your seats," went on the tall lad, "and I'll try to get through. It's the only way to do with such a chap as Noddy."

"What about the professor?" asked Bob in a low voice, for the scientist was some distance away from the car now, having walked back along the road. "If we call to him Noddy will hear us, and guess what we're up to."

"Wait until we get past, and then we can stop and wait for Mr. Snodgrass," advised Ned.

"Good idea," commented Jerry. "Hop in lively now!"

They were in their seats a moment later, and

Jerry very luckily started the engine on the spark.

"Here! What are you going to do?" yelled Noddy, as he caught the chugging of the motor.

"We're going on," replied Jerry calmly, as he threw in the gear. As he let the clutch slip into place, the car suddenly shot ahead.

"They're going to ram, you Noddy!" yelled Bill Berry. "Look out!"

"Nothing of the sort! We're going to try to pass," called back Ned.

"Go ahead, Noddy!" cried Bill.

"Look out or there'll be a collision!" cautioned Bob, for Noddy's machine was also trying to slip into the narrow passage ahead of the car of our friends.

"Stay where you are!" warned Jerry. "I can make it if you stand still for a second!"

"Well, I'm not going to!" flared up Noddy, and as the tall lad urged his car toward the little strip of roadway between the piles of dirt, steering with skill, the bully also sent his machine toward the same place.

A head-on collision seemed imminent, and for an instant Jerry's heart failed him. He was about to jam on the brakes and stop, when he saw that by putting on a spurt of speed he could just make it. His foot pressed the accelerator pedal, and with a snort, the auto of the motor boys shot ahead through a narrow opening.

"Look out!" shouted Ned. "You'll have us in the ditch, Jerry!"

Jerry gave the steering wheel a quick twist to get clear of the ditch, and also to avoid running into Noddy's car which was now forging toward him.

He just managed to pass by, and was steering back on the road again, when, before he could possibly avoid it, a little spotted calf dashed out of a lane leading into the highway.

The small animal, with a bleat, got directly in the path of the auto of our friends, and stood there with its legs far apart.

"Look out!" shouted Ned. "You'll hit it, Jerry."

But it was too late. The force acquired from the sudden spurt could not be overcome in an instant, even though Jerry jammed on both brakes with all his force.

A moment later he hit the calf squarely and the unfortunate little creature went down in the road, under the car.

CHAPTER M

"STUNG!"

"HERE, hold on there! Stop that gasolene contraption! I'll have th' law on ye fer runnin' down my calf-critter! What right ye got t' go racin' around th' land killin' a poor man's critters right an' left? Hold on, I'll sue ye fer damages!"

A grizzled old man, wearing a pair of ragged overalls, with a ragged blue jacket to match, and with a bunch of white whiskers on his chin wiggling up and down as he shouted the above words, rushed down the lane out of which the spotted calf had come, and shook his fist at the lads in the auto.

"Hold on there!" he repeated.

"We are holding on," remarked Jerry grimly, as he got out and looked under the car at the calf.

The creature had not been touched by the wheels, but lay between them. Unnaturally still it lay, nor did it bleat or give a sign of life. Jerry took hold of the tail, and was about to pull it

out, hoping it was not much hurt, though his heart misgave him.

"Here, what ye goin' t' do?" demanded the angry farmer.

"I was going to pull the calf out from under our car," replied Jerry. "It—it fell there."

"Humph! A likely story. I saw ye deliberately run down my calf-critter. You let it alone until I git some witnesses, an' prove a case agin ye! Let it alone!"

"I guess it's dead, anyhow," said Ned in a low voice, as he stood beside Jerry.

"Deader than a lobster," added Bob. "You must have hit it an awful poke, Jerry."

"Keep quiet, can't you?" urged Ned. "This skinflint of a farmer will hear you," for the man was gazing at the trio of lads with angry eyes.

Noddy Nixon, with a look of triumphant gloating on his face, came forward, followed by Bill Berry. Professor Snodgrass, oblivious to everything save his favorite pursuit, was some distance down the road, using his net with energy.

"I didn't hit it hard at all," Jerry said. "The calf ran right across the road. Why I hardly struck it at all. I had the brakes on ready to stop, anyhow."

"Don't talk to me about brakes!" snapped the

farmer. "Ye broke my calf's neck, an' it was a valuable critter. Don't ye dare touch it till I git some witnesses, an' prove a case on ye. I want damages, an' heavy damages, too! I want witnesses."

"We'll be witnesses for you!" broke in Noddy eagerly. "It was entirely the fault of those fellows that your calf was killed, Mr.—er—Mr.—?" he paused suggestively.

"Sackett is my name—Ebenezer Sackett, of Tewkesbury Township," supplied the farmer. "I live right over that way a short piece, jest below th' hill. I was drivin' my calf down the lane, when all to onct this rip-snortin' ragin' and tearin' automobile comes along an' kills him. I want damages, an' heavy damages, too!"

"We saw them kill the calf," went on Noddy, seemingly eager to array himself against the motor boys, and on the side of the farmer. "Didn't we, Bill?"

"Sure we did," answered the bully's crony.

"Then you must have very good eyesight," remarked Jerry cuttingly, "for you were in your car, and how you could observe the calf, when it is so small that it doesn't come to the top of our radiator, is more than I can understand."

"Well, we saw it just the same, Mr. Sackett,"

went on the ugly bully. "They killed your animal, and you ought to make them pay for it."

"That's what I intend," asserted the farmer. "I'll attach their machine, that's what I'll do ef they don't pay. Hi there, Abner!" he called, as a man, evidently one of the hired help, came hurrying along the lane, "Abner, you go notify Constable Higbie that I got a case fer him. I want these fellers arrested fer killin' my spotted calf!"

"Gosh all hemlock!" cried Abner, as he stared at the scene before him.

"You go git th' constable," repeated Mr. Sackett, "an' I'll hold these fellers until you come back with him. I'll show 'em that they can't monkey with Ebenezer Sackett of Tewkesbury Township."

"Isn't it against the law to let animals run at large on the highway?" asked Ned of Mr. Sackett.

"He wasn't runnin' at large," was the answer. "I was leading him, an' he broke away from me. Ye can't git out of it that way. I want damages an' I'm goin' t' have 'em! Th' constable will be here soon, an' ye kin take yer choice of payin' or goin' t' jail."

How long this dispute might have been kept up it is difficult to say, but Professor Snodgrass ar-

rived just then, and, hearing the story, endeavored to conciliate the angry farmer. But there was no subduing Mr. Sackett.

"I want damages!" he declared firmly.

"Oh, say, there's only one way to end this," said Ned finally, putting his hand in his pocket. "It wasn't our fault, but I suppose we've got to stand being gouged by this fellow. I'll pay him, Jerry, as this trip is on my father's account, and then we can get along. How much was your calf worth, Mr. Sackett?"

"Fifty dollars ef he was a cent!"

"Fifty dollars!" gasped Bob.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, who could be very practical on occasions. know something of farm animals. Pull that calf out, Jerry, and let's look at him."

Jerry and Ned grasped the tail, and soon had the creature out in the highway. The farmer offered no further objections to it being moved, now that it seemed as if he was in a fair way to collect damages.

"Humph! A very young calf," commented Mr. Snodgrass. "Hardly fit to kill for veal. And it doesn't seem to have been hit very hard."

"No, it was a very gentle blow," said Jerry.

"The car was almost at a standstill when he ran into it."

"It must have died easily," went on the scientist. "Now, Mr. Sackett, you'll have to lower your figure, for I know that calf was never worth any fifty dollars."

"Well, it's wuth forty."

"Forty? Nonsense. If you sold it for fifteen you'd be getting more than it was worth. We'll give you twenty dollars for the animal, and not another cent."

"I'll not take it," stormed the farmer.

"That's right! Make 'em pay more, or sue 'em!" put in Noddy.

"You mind your own affairs, Nixon!" said the professor curtly, and Noddy slunk back toward his machine.

"Will you take twenty dollars, or will you let the matter go to court?" asked the scientist, taking some bills from his pocket, and motioning to the boys that he would conduct the case for them.

"I want thirty dollars, anyhow," said Mr. Sackett. "Ha! Here comes Abner with the constable. Now we'll see what happens."

"Offer him twenty-five, and I think he'll take it," said Ned in a low voice. "We can't stay here any longer."

"All right, if you say so," agreed the professor, "but I think I could get him down to twenty. Well, Mr. Sackett," went on the scientist, "we'll pay you twenty-five dollars, and not another cent. If that's not satisfactory we'll give the constable a bond, and we'll fight the case in the courts."

This was said with such an air of decision that the farmer saw that it was useless to stand out for more.

"I'll take it," said Mr. Sackett reluctantly, "but th' calf was wuth forty dollars ef it was a cent."

"Nonsense!" declared the professor, as he paid over the money. "Haul the carcass out of the way, and we'll be getting on, boys."

"It's a regular case of hold-up," muttered Ned, as he dragged the calf farther out of the path of the auto.

The farmer pocketed the money with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes. Noddy Nixon, looking disappointed, perhaps because the motor boys had not been arrested, started back to his machine, followed by his crony, and soon they were chugging away down the road. Our friends and the professor entered their car.

"Whew! That was a hot time while it lasted!" remarked Bob, when they had gone on some distance.

"Yes, and all Noddy Nixon's fault," added Ned.

"Talk about highway robbers," declared Jerry, "Mr. Sackett comes pretty nearly being one."

They were filled with righteous anger against Mr. Sackett, and this was added to when they learned something about him when they stopped a little later at a country hotel for dinner.

While they were waiting for the meal to be prepared they got talking to the hotel clerk. They mentioned their experience with Mr. Sackett, and told of paying for the calf.

"Excuse me, strangers," broke in a farmer who was seated near a table reading, "but was this calf you speak of a brown and white spotted one?"

"It was," answered Jerry.

"With a very long tail?" the man wanted to know.

"Very long," spoke Ned, who had particularly noted the appendage as he dragged the creature out of the way.

"And was it a thin, poor-looking sort of a calf?" went on the man.

"It was," said Mr. Snodgrass. "You seem to know this calf in question."

"Know it? I guess I do!" was the answer.

"And I know Eb Sackett, too. Why that calf had been condemned by the county inspector of cattle, an' Eb had been ordered to kill it. Th' calf had some catchin' disease, an' Eb was under orders t' git rid of it inside of twenty-four hours, or pay a fine of fifty dollars. He was takin' it off to shoot it, when you must have bunked into it."

"Are you sure of this?" asked Ned.

"Course I am, strangers. Why, I'm a deputy cattle inspector, an' I'm on my way now to see if Eb carried out the orders he got. But if you say the calf is dead there ain't no use in me goin' on."

"Oh, it's dead all right," replied Jerry with a queer look at his chums.

"And we paid twenty-five dollars for the privilege of killing a calf that had been condemned, and would have been killed, anyhow," murmured Ned. "Well, if we weren't——"

"Stung!" interrupted Bob. "Stung good and proper!"

"By Mr. Ebenezer Sackett," added Jerry.

"I guess his name ought to be Mr. 'Sock-it,' instead of Sackett," commented the hotel clerk. "That certainly was a swindle he worked on you, gentlemen, and he socked it to you!"

"And it ain't the fust time Eb's done a trick

like that, nor it won't be the last," spoke the deputy cattle inspector. "I'm sorry for you boys, an' if you want to go back, an' make him give up your money, I'll do all I can for ye."

"I'd like to, but we haven't time now," replied Ned, as he thought of the necessity for hurrying

on to see Mr. Jackson.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNLUCKY BLOWOUT

"EASY marks, that's what we are," commented Ned, as with his chums and Professor Snodgrass, he sat down to dinner. "Very easy marks."

"It might have happened to anyone," declared Jerry. "But it sure does make me sore to think how he cheated us on that calf deal."

They were still talking of Mr. Sackett, and, as the account of the happening became generally known in the hotel, many stories showing the meanness of the miserly farmer were told to our heroes. Mr. Sackett was characterized as a "skinflint" of the worst kind.

They started off again, soon after dinner, and made up for the time lost over the calf transaction by speeding up to the limit allowed by the law, and, in places where there were particularly good roads, and where there were no houses, they even exceeded the limit slightly. But their necessity justified it.

"Think we'll make Durham before dark,

Jerry?" asked Bob, as he noticed the sun beginning to sink low in the west. "How much farther is it?"

"The last sign-post said thirty miles," remarked Ned, "but if it's anything like the usual post, that means it will be at least forty before we strike Durham."

"In that case we won't get in until after dark," was Jerry's opinion. "But we have powerful gas lamps, and it won't matter much. Here, Ned, you take the wheel a bit, I'm tired."

The machine was stopped while the change was made, and they went on again. Jerry cast several anxious glances at a bank of clouds gathering in the west, and Bob, also noting them, remarked:

"I think we're in for a storm."

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed the tall lad. "Hit her up for all she's worth, Ned. Take a few chances. I don't believe there'll be any speedconstables out now."

It soon became evident that they were not going to make Durham before nightfall. In fact, after passing one post by which they were informed that their destination was thirty miles farther on, the next one made it thirty-two.

"Say, according to that we're going backward," commented Ned.

"Don't mind," advised Jerry. "Keep right on, and when we arrive we'll be there."

"Wise man," asserted Bob with a laugh.

The threatened storm gathered more quickly as the afternoon waned, and they had not gone many more miles before the rumbling of thunder increased, and the intermittent flashes of lightning became almost continuous.

"We're going to be in for it," warned Bob, as the first few splashes of rain came.

"Yes, we'd better stop, put up the top, and the side curtains," advised Ned. "I want the wind shield up, too, for I don't like the rain in my face."

They were soon better prepared to stand the downpour which quickly came, and with the heavy curtains and the top up, they were fairly snug and comfortable in the auto, as it chugged off through the darkness.

"Ugh!" suddenly grunted Ned, as he felt the wheels leave the hard macadam road, and slip into the soft mud of a dirt highway. "Now we're in for it."

The auto labored on, losing time as the rain turned the highway into a veritable slough. The downpour got heavier, and a wind springing up, seemed to force the water through every crack

and crevice of the protecting curtains. The lightning, too, was incessant, and the thunder claps came with startling rapidity.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" grumbled Bob. "It'll soon be as black as tar, and we'll get stuck ten miles from nowhere."

"Oh, don't find fault," advised Jerry goodnaturedly. "We may make it yet."

Ned peered anxiously ahead through the mist of rain, seeking to make out the road, which was illuminated by the powerful gas lamps. It was risky driving, but there was no help for it, and he was not well acquainted with the route.

"Can't you get a little more speed out of her?" asked Jerry, when there came a lull in the storm.

"I'm afraid to risk it," replied the youthful steersman. "If we happen to hit a big stone it will be all up with us. Wow! This is Lonesomeville for fair!"

They were on a dark and deserted stretch of the road. There seemed to be no houses within miles, and the storm was at its height.

Suddenly there was a sound like a gun shot. The motor boys started, but well they knew what it was.

"A blowout!" groaned Bob.

"I should say it was," agreed Jerry grimly. "It

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couldn't have happened at a worse time, either. Where in the world are we?"

He peered through a crack in the curtains, out on the dismal rain-soaked blackness, but could make out nothing.

"Well, there's no help for it. It's up to us to put a new shoe and tube on," spoke Ned, who had quickly brought the car to a stop. Then the three lads, having donned rubber coats, which fortunately they carried with them, got out of the car, and stood in the mud, with the rain pelting them, while they made ready to repair the damaged tire.

CHAPTER VII

A SURPRISED INTRUDER

"Going to stand here looking at it all night?" demanded Jerry after a pause, during which his two chums had vainly sought to prevent the rain from trickling down inside the collars of their coats. "Do you think the tire is going to mend itself, Bob?"

"I only wish it would!" devoutly exclaimed Chunky. "Wow! This is fierce!"

"No help for it," mumbled Ned, as he wiped the dashing rain drops from his eyes. "Hand me the jack, Jerry, I'll get the car up, you can take off the tire and we'll make Bob put on the new shoe and tube. That's a fair division of labor."

"I'll be gum-swizzled if I can see it, as Mr. Sackett would say," exclaimed the fat lad. "You give me the hardest part to do."

"Good for reducing flesh," remarked Jerry as he reached under the seat and got out the jack and a new inner tube. "Fetch around one of the oil headlights, Bob, so we can see what we are doing, and unstrap a shoe."

Bob started for the lantern, splashed into a deep mud hole, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Wow! Say, I'm in up to my knees!" he complained.

"And I'm gradually sinking down," added Ned. "It looks as if we were in a bog, or a quicksand. Fellows, I do believe the auto is going down!"

"Hey! What's that? The auto sinking?" cried the voice of Professor Snodgrass. For the time being the boys had forgotten about him, and he seemed to have either fallen into a slumber, or to have been thinking so deeply there in the darkness that he was not aware of the accident. "Don't tell me we're sinking!" he implored.

"Well, if we're not, it's a good imitation of it," declared Jerry, as he looked at the wheels of the auto, now deep in the soft mud.

"Oh, what will become of my valuable specimens?" cried the scientist. "I must save them!" and he leaped from the auto, holding in his arms half a dozen small boxes. He landed in a puddle of water, which splashed all over the motor boys,

and their sudden exclamations of dismay further added to the alarm of the professor.

"I didn't know we had run into a river!" he cried. "Why didn't you warn me? I was thinking of a plan to capture the singing fish, and I didn't pay any attention to where we were going."

"Neither did the auto, apparently," remarked Ned. "But it's not quite as bad as a river, Professor. We're comparatively safe. You'd better get back under shelter, and we'll fix the tire," for the little scientist was speedily being drenched, as he stood there in the storm without a protecting coat.

"Thanks. I believe I will. I wish I could help you boys. Wait until I put my boxes where they won't get wet, and I'll do what I can." The professor reëntered the car.

"No, we'll manage," declared Jerry. "Get busy with the jack, if you're going to, Ned."

The merchant's son went around to the wheel on which the tire had burst, and stooped down in the mud and water, while Bob held the lantern. The wind blew more powerfully, fairly stinging the rain into the faces of our heroes. They were deep in the muck, and even their raincoats were but small protection.

Ned tried to slip the jack under the axle, but

the foot of the implement went so far down into the mud that no purchase, or lifting power, could be obtained.

"Get me a flat stone, or several of them, or a fence rail, or something to put under the jack," ordered Ned, straightening up with a groan of anguish. "I've got to have something to set it on. Get busy, Chunky! Look around with your lantern for a flat rock."

"Say, do you think I'm going to do it all?" demanded the stout lad in injured tones.

"You haven't done anything yet," retorted Ned sharply. The storm and the accident was getting on the nerves of all of them, and tempers were sorely tried.

"Here, Bob, I'll help," broke in Jerry goodnaturedly, with the intention of pouring oil on troubled waters. "I'll get the other lantern and we'll give an imitation of two Diogeneses looking for a flat stone."

As the tall lad made his way forward, splashing through the mud and water to detach the other headlight, Professor Snodgrass, who had safely packed away his specimen boxes, uttered a cry.

"Look, boys!" he called, "there's a light coming this way. Maybe it's another auto, and they'll help you."

They all looked. Down the road, dimly seen through the mist of the rain, was a bobbing light.

"If that's an auto it's either got the blind staggers, or else it's steering itself," remarked Ned.

"It's a man with a lantern," declared Bob.

"And he's coming this way," added Jerry.

"That settles it," went on Ned, throwing the jack back into the tonneau.

"Settles what?" demanded Jerry.

"This repair job. I'm going to wait until morning. We can't do anything in the storm and darkness."

"What are we going to do? Stay out here all night, stuck in the mud?" asked the tall lad.

"We're going to stay stuck in the mud all right, I guess, fellows," retorted Ned, as he watched the progress of the moving light, "but we're not going to stay out here all night, not to my way of thinking."

"Why not? Where are you going?" inquired Bob. "Do you see a hotel off in the distance?" and he pretended to look like the villain in the play, who shades his eyes with his hand and gazes down the wings, for a sight of some one approaching on horseback.

"Here's how I size it up," went on Ned. "There's a man coming with a light. He's walk-

ing, so evidently he doesn't live far from here, or he'd be riding. If he lives around here there must be some sort of a house, and when he gets here I'm going to ask him to take us in. I'd be willing to sleep in a stable to get out of this storm. We can leave the auto here, and in the morning we can put on a new tire, and start off. How about it?"

"It sounds good to me, if the man will take us in," agreed Jerry.

"You'll soon be able to tell," remarked the professor. "He's almost here."

The bobbing light approached nearer, and soon, by its rays, the boys could see that the lantern was carried by a grizzled farmer, who wore a horse blanket as a raincoat. He stopped, and standing in a puddle of water demanded:

"Are ye stuck, strangers?"

"That's what," replied Jerry.

"Can you accommodate us over night?" asked Ned quickly. "We're willing to pay you well."

"Oh, I guess I could put you up," drawled the "I live all alone, jest a piece down the man. road. I saw the lights on your machine, an' I sensed that suthin' were wrong, so I come out t' help. This is a powerful bad bit of road, an' lots of machines has trouble. Generally they comes t'

me fer help an' I does what I kin. If ye'll walk along I'll light th' way, though it's a measly bad storm."

"Will it be safe to leave the auto here, boys?" asked the professor.

"Oh, yes," replied Jerry. "No one could run away with it to-night, but I'll take the precaution of locking the ignition system, and that will prevent anyone tampering with it. I guess we'll go with you, Mr.—" He paused and looked at the farmer.

"Buttle is my name, Enoch Buttle. Come right along. I ain't got a very scrumptious place, but ye're welcome."

"I must get my valuables!" exclaimed the professor suddenly, as he reached back under the seat where he had piled his specimen boxes. "It would never do to leave them here." As he emerged with the small packages in his arms, shielding them from the wet as well as he could, Mr. Buttle looked at the scientist sharply, and asked:

"Suthin' ye're particularly fond of there, neighbor?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass. "There's at least a thousand dollars in these boxes." He referred to his valuation of his speci-

mens. A sharp and crafty look passed over the farmer's face. It was gone in an instant, and before the boys, who were busy getting the auto in shape to leave standing on the road, had had a chance to notice the expression.

Splashing down the muddy road the four followed the lead of the farmer, and his bobbing lantern. The red tail light of the auto, as well as the two oil headlights had been left burning, so that no other traveller would crash into the obstruction.

Rather discouraged by their plight, pretty well wet through, anxious about getting an early start in the morning, there was no very cheerful spirit manifested among our friends as they trudged on. Professor Snodgrass carried his boxes, oblivious to everything else, even the pelting rain, which soaked him through. Jerry wanted the scientist to take his stormcoat, but Mr. Snodgrass would not hear of such a thing.

"Keep it yourself, Jerry," he said. "I'm used to being wet through in my business. I'll soon dry out when we get to Mr. Buttle's house."

"Can't I carry your valuables for you?" asked the farmer who was walking beside Mr. Snodgrass. "Oh, no indeed! I never let anyone but myself take these precious things," replied the scientist. "If anything should happen to them I never could replace them."

A little later they were at the farmhouse. It was a small one, quite old-fashioned, and, from what little glimpse the boys had of it as they entered, it did not seem to be in very good repair.

"Here's where I live," said Mr. Buttle. "It's not very good, but it's the best I've got. Now I can make you a cup of coffee, and fry some ham and eggs, if you'd like 'em."

"Would we?" cried Bob, and there was a hungry gleam in his eyes.

"Wa'al, I'll git right t' work. I do my own cookin'. I've got an oil stove. Git off your things, an' I'll git th' meal. I dunno whether we'll call it supper or brekfust, but it don't much matter. I'll be right back, an' after ye eat I'll make ye up some beds on th' floor. It's the best I kin do."

"Oh, we'll be glad to get them," said Ned, "no matter what they are."

The old man, with a quick glance at Professor Snodgrass, bustled from the room, and our friends proceeded to take off some of their wet garments, hanging them over chairs near an old-fashioned fire-place in which, in spite of the fact that it was summer, a blaze was cheerfully burning.

"This will dry us out," observed Jerry, holding his benumbed hands to the flames.

"That's right, git close to th' fire," remarked Mr. Buttle, as he came in a little later, leaving open the kitchen door, whence came the savory smell of ham and eggs, mingling with coffee. "I lit th' fire when the storm come up."

"Say, does it strike you that our host hasn't the most pleasant face in the world?" asked Jerry of his chums, when the old man had again gone out.

"You shouldn't look gift-horses in the mouth," observed Ned.

"You can't see his mouth—too many whiskers," came from Bob with a chuckle. "I'm glad we're going to feed, anyhow."

"No, but seriously, I don't like his looks," went on the tall lad. "If we had any valuables I'd feel like putting them under my pillow, provided we get one when we go to bed."

"Oh, you're nervous," declared Ned, and then conversation on that line came to an end, for Mr.

Buttle announced supper. It was as good a meal as could be expected under the circumstances, and the boys and the professor did full justice to it.

"An' now for beds," announced their host, and a little later, having been gone from the room for some time, he came back to state that the sleeping arrangements were completed.

"I'll have to put you three young fellows on beds on th' floor in one room," he said, "an' Mr. Snodgrass kin have th' next room. It's the best I kin do."

"Can't we all be together?" asked Jerry, with a suspicious glance at his companions.

"I'm sorry, but my house ain't quite big enough," was the answer.

"Oh, I don't mind," Professor Snodgrass hastened to say. "I'll take all my valuables in with me, for I wouldn't want anything to happen to them. I'll be all right, and we can leave the door open between."

Jerry felt that it would hardly be right to say anything more, and so, in about half an hour, when they were nearly dried out before the welcome blaze, they went up to the improvised bedrooms.

"I thought you said we could have the door

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open between our room and the professor's?" asked Jerry when he had looked at the arrangements.

"Wa'al, I did think so, but I jest discovered that th' connectin' door is locked, an' I can't find th' key," said Mr. Buttle, nervously moving about.

"Oh, it won't matter," was the professor's opinion, and he went into his apartment carrying with him his precious boxes of specimens, while Jerry, with growing suspicion, caught a crafty look which Mr. Buttle gave the scientist.

"Lock your door, Professor," whispered the tall lad, as they prepared for bed. "Lock it, and put a chair against it."

"What for?" demanded Mr. Snodgrass. "Do you think——?"

"I don't like the looks of that man," went on Jerry. "Put your watch and money under your head. We'll do the same."

"Oh, you're too fussy," declared Bob, as the footsteps of their host could be heard descending the stairs, after he had called a "good-night" to them. "You're nervous, Jerry."

"Well, perhaps I am, but I'm going to lock our door just the same. No use taking chances."

Jerry did so, and also took the precaution to

draw a chair against the portal. He called to know if Mr. Snodgrass had done the same.

"Yes," replied the scientist, "though I have no fear. My watch is only a cheap one, and I didn't bring much money with me. I will put my specimen boxes where no one can get at them without awakening me."

In spite of his worries Jerry was soon asleep, as were the others, for they were tired and worn out. Ned was thinking anxiously of what the morrow might bring forth, and he hoped soon to be in communication with Mr. Jackson.

Just what hour it was Jerry could not determine, but he was suddenly awakened by a noise as if some one had pushed a chair across the room. Instantly all his suspicions came back to him, but, before arousing his companions he made up his mind to investigate.

Cautiously he crawled to the door of their room, and, feeling about in the darkness, discovered that the chair he had placed against the portal was still in place.

"It wasn't in here," he murmured. "I wonder if the professor is up?" He was just about to rouse Ned and Bob, and had in mind to call the scientist, when from the latter's apartment there suddenly came a series of startled yells.

"Ouch! Oh my! Let go! I'm bein' stabbed! Some beast has holt of me! Let go, consarn ye, or I'll stomp on ye!"

There was a riot of racket in the adjoining room.

"What's the matter?" yelled Ned, jumping up.

"Is the place on fire?" asked Bob, pressing the spring of a portable electric light he had with him, and partly illuminating the room.

"Here! Get out! What are you doing?

Thieves! Murder! Help, boys, help!"

"It's the professor!" gasped Jerry. "That rascal is attacking him!"

"We're coming, Professor!" sung out Ned. He began sliding back the chair that Jerry had placed against the door, while Bob held the light.

"Not that way! This!" shouted Jerry, and, putting his shoulder to the connecting door, he burst it open with a mighty shove.

The three chums piled into the professor's room, and in the light of Bob's lamp saw a curious sight.

Dancing about in fear and pain was Mr. Buttle. Fast to the thumb of each hand was an enormous, pinching, black beetle, some of the specimens recently gathered by the professor. The boxes were scattered about the room, and the scientist with



DANCING ABOUT IN FEAR AND PAIN WAS MR. BUTTLE.



apprehension on his face was scurrying about, gathering up several choice insects which had been released by the intruder.

"Take these beasts off me or I'll sue ye!" cried Mr. Buttle. "Take 'em away 'fore they eat my thumbs off! Wow! Jehoshaphat, how they pinch!"

CHAPTER VIII

A DISAPPOINTMENT

For a few moments the boys stood there almost spellbound, gazing at the startled farmer, on whose face the look of pain increased.

"How did it happen?" demanded Jerry, when the intruder into the professor's room had succeeded in shaking off the two beetles, and was looking critically at his injured thumbs. The insects had drawn blood.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered the professor, as he made a grab for a large bug that was trying to get down a crack, for some of the scientist's specimens were very lively. "I'm sure I don't know. I was sleeping peacefully, when I was suddenly awakened by this man shouting."

"How did you come to get the beetles?" asked Jerry, looking severely at Mr. Buttle.

"I didn't git 'em, they got me," he declared. "Th' consarned critters pinch wuss than lobsters."

"They are a form of land lobster," the pro-

fessor explained as he carefully caught the two beetles in a box and closed the lid. "But I don't see how they got out. I had the top securely closed."

"Perhaps Mr. Buttle can explain," remarked Ned significantly. That individual squirmed uneasily.

"Wa'al, I got t' thinkin' in th' night, that maybe th' professor might need a drink of water,"
explained the farmer, "'count of him eatin' so
much ham. So I brung some water up. There's
the pitcher," and he pointed to one, in proof of
his assertion. "I knocked on th' door," he went
on, "but th' professor didn't answer, an' then I
thought it'd be a pity to wake him up. So I
thought I'd jest push th' door open, an' leave th'
water where he could git it.

"Wa'al, I done so, an' I were jest leavin' when them two big black bugs jumped out of th' darkness an' grabbed me. Then I let out a yell."

"Yes, we heard you yell," spoke Bob gently, and Ned felt like laughing, only the matter seemed to be too serious.

"I don't see how those horned beetles could get out when the boxes were tightly fastened," observed the professor simply.

"Wa'al, they got out all right, an' they got on

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me," went on th' farmer. "Ef I git blood poison I'll have t' sue ye."

"You had no right to come in the room of Mr. Snodgrass without knocking, or telling him," said Jerry.

"I didn't want to wake him up, when I brought in th' water. An' look at my door—all busted!" proceeded the farmer indignantly, looking at the portal Jerry had smashed. "Somebody's got t' pay fer that."

"Yes, we'll settle," agreed Jerry, and then, as if fearing he might be asked embarrassing questions, Mr. Buttle suddenly departed, tramping indignantly down the stairs, and muttering meanwhile something about "crazy automobile folks thet carried wild animals with 'em!"

"Well, what do you think, fellows?" asked Ned, as they stood looking at each other in the dim illumination of the electric light Bob held.

"It looks rather funny," declared the stout youth.

"It wouldn't have been funny if my specimens had gotten away," observed the scientist. "He knocked down the whole pile of boxes at my head, and that's how some of them must have come open."

"No, that's not the way," was Jerry's opinion.

"I'll tell you what I think. I believe our host is a dangerous character, and I think he sneaked up, hoping the professor had money in those boxes. He was going to rob him, but the beetles turned the trick."

"Do you really think so?" inquired Mr. Snod-grass.

"I certainly do," replied the tall lad.

"And I agree with him," added Ned. "I remember now that the professor spoke of his 'valuables' in the boxes, and I saw Mr. Buttle looking at him rather sharply. That's just how it was. He thought he was going to make a good haul."

"It's lucky we weren't all murdered in our sleep," exclaimed Bob, with a nervous look around.

"Oh, hardly as bad as that, I think," came from Jerry. "However, Mr. Buttle has had his lesson, and I think he won't sneak around us again. He must have unlocked the professor's door with a duplicate key, and when he pushed the chair across the floor that woke me up."

Jerry's explanation was accepted, and they went back to bed, but it was some time before they got to sleep. When Jerry awoke again it was just getting light, and as he was as anxious as was Ned to be on the road again, he roused

his companions. Professor Snodgrass was already up, making a careful inspection of his specimen boxes by daylight, to see if any of the bugs had escaped. He found them all intact.

"What shall we do; take chances on having breakfast with Mr. Buttle?" asked Ned, as they were ready to go down stairs.

"I vote that we pay him what we owe him, and go on to the next town for breakfast," spoke Ned. "We can put the tire on, and make good time. It's stopped raining."

"Well, I'm pretty hungry," remarked Bob with a woebegone face, "and it's no fun putting on a tire without your breakfast, but I wouldn't want him to poison us, and he might do it to get even."

"Then we'll start off and hunt our own break-fast," decided Jerry. When they went downstairs they found no signs of their host. Evidently he did not care to meet them face to face in daylight. So, after leaving where he would see it a sum of money sufficient to pay for their supper and the night's lodging, and also to repair the broken door, our friends departed. Jerry left a note, stating what the money was for.

They found their auto undisturbed, and soon

had the tire repaired. They kept a lookout for the farmer, whom they believed to be a rascal, but saw no signs of him, and made good time to the next town, where they got a good breakfast at the hotel. There, having mentioned the fact that they had spent the night with Mr. Buttle, they were told that they had taken a big chance.

"That fellow's a regular hold-up man," said the hotel clerk. "He makes a practice of swindling autoists. It's been said that he puts tacks and glass in the road, so they'll get damaged tires right in front of his place, and then when they halt to make repairs, he comes out and offers to sell food at about three times the market prices. That's the way he makes his living, instead of farming it. He 'grafts' on the autoists."

"Well, he'll be careful how he tackles this party another time," remarked Jerry significantly.

They had left bad roads behind, and now, spinning over hard and smooth highways, they found themselves, a little after nine o'clock that morning, in the city of Durham.

"Now for Mr. Jackson!" cried Ned, as they inquired the way to the sanitarium where the millionaire operator was staying.

Up the broad road, through the entrance gates

went our heroes. The place was attractively laid out, and was quite celebrated as a health resort for overworked men and women of the wealthy and fashionable class.

"We'll let you do the talking, at first, Professor," decided Ned, as he guided the car around the turns in the road.

"Yes, I'll be glad to meet my friend Mr. Jackson again. I think—hold on just a moment, Ned. I think I see a rare kind of beetle."

The boys were in a hurry, but the memory of the good service the professor's beetles had done the previous night made them willing to stop the car. Mr. Snodgrass got out, and succeeded in capturing a bug, the possession of which seemed to give him great delight. Then Ned speeded up the machine as the latest specimen was carefully put away.

They came to a halt in front of a sort of hotel-sanitarium, and Ned and Mr. Snodgrass went to the front door.

"Well, now, I'm real sorry, but you've had your trip for nothing," the manager informed them, when they had stated whom they wished to see.

"Why, isn't Mr. Jackson here?" asked Ned anxiously.

"He was here, up to last night. But he went away suddenly, and he won't be back."

"Where has he gone?" asked the professor.

"Out to the big airship and balloon meet at Danforth."

"To a balloon meet?" repeated Ned in surprise.

"Yes. Didn't you know that Mr. Jackson was an enthusiastic balloonist and aviator?"

"I knew he had many fads," spoke the professor, "but I didn't know he included ballooning among them."

"Oh, yes," went on the manager. "He is much interested in all sorts of air craft. In fact he talked of nothing else while he was here. He has invented some sort of dirigible balloon, or aeroplane—some kind of air machine. I'm not very well up on them, so I can't describe it to you. I believe he is going to enter it at the Danforth meet. I'm sorry, but you're just too late to catch him."

"So are we," agreed Ned sorrowfully. He knew his father would be much disappointed, but there was no help for it. Despondently the merchant's son turned and followed the professor out of the hotel. Jerry and Bob sat in the auto waiting for them.

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"Well, what luck?" asked the tall lad, as his chum approached.

"He's just left," answered Mr. Snodgrass.

"Gone ballooning," added Ned. "Out to the Danforth meet and that's just outside of New York. We'll never catch him, now."

"Yes, we will!" cried Jerry suddenly.

"How?"

"In our motor-ship Comet!" exclaimed the tall lad. "We'll fix that up, and get right on the trail of Mr. Jackson again. Come on, Ned. Back tracks for Cresville, and then for another voyage through the air!"

CHAPTER IX

GETTING EVEN

LITTLE time was lost starting back for Cresville. The boys hoped to be at home that night, and planned to at once start at work remodelling their airship.

"And then we'll go to Danforth," decided Jerry.

"I don't want to miss Mr. Jackson again, if I can help it."

"Oh, that balloon and aeroplane meet will last for some time," explained the tall lad. "Mr. Jackson is sure to be around there. We'll land him this time. It won't take long to fix up the Comet, if we all get to work on it."

"It will seem good again to go scooting through the air," observed Bob.

"Yes; no danger of killing diseased calves up above the clouds," agreed Jerry, with a laugh.

"I wonder if we'll see anything of Mr. Sackett on our way back?" said Ned.

"Hope not," was Bob's comment, "though we will pass through Tewkesbury Township. I've seen all I want to of that swindler."

They stopped for dinner that day in the same hotel where the deputy cattle inspector had told them of the trick Mr. Sackett had worked on them, and, among the guests at the dinner table was the same deputy himself.

"There's Mr. Rider," announced Jerry in a low tone to his two chums, as the waitress helped them to some fried chicken. The inspector caught his name, looked up, and saw the boys.

"Well, if there ain't the young fellows who go around buying condemned calves!" he exclaimed, getting up from the table to shake hands with them and the professor. "I'm real glad to see you again," announced Mr. Rider, and he changed his plate over to their table, where he talked interestingly on many subjects.

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Sackett lately?" asked Jerry with a smile, as they finished dinner and sat in the hotel parlor for a rest before starting on again.

"No, but I expect to soon. I've got to go out that way. The county board of health has another case against him, and I expect to be sent on it within a day or two." "What's it about—some more condemned calves?" asked Ned.

"No, it's chickens this time. He's got a big flock of what he claims are pure-blooded buff Cochins, but they're not. They're a hybrid strain, and what's more they have an incurable disease. The trouble with Sackett is that he doesn't feed his stock right, nor take any care of it. That's why it's nearly all diseased.

"These chickens are particularly bad. They're nice-looking fowls, but as soon as they get to a certain age they die off. There are a lot of chicken-raisers around Sackett's place, and they're afraid their flocks will catch the ailment. So I've been ordered to tell him to get rid of all his fowls, disinfect his coops, and start all over. I know he'll kick like a steer, he's so miserly, but he'll have to do it."

"Has he got many chickens?" asked Bob.

"About two hundred, and he values them pretty highly, but they're not worth a dollar. If any one bought them they'd be stuck, for the fowls would die inside of a month."

The deputy inspector told the boys several stories about Mr. Sackett, and also regaled them with the news of the vicinity. Then, as they

did not want to spend another night away from home, they said good-by and departed.

Jerry was driving the car, and they were going along at a good clip, when there came a sudden snap, and something seemed to be wrong. The tall lad brought the machine up with a jerk, jumped out, and made a hasty examination.

"One of the small springs broken!" he announced ruefully.

"Can't it be fixed? Will we have to get out and walk?" asked Ned.

"It could be repaired if we were near a blacksmith shop," answered Jerry. "It isn't a bad break, and I can still go on, but not very fast, and it may get worse, if it isn't repaired."

"I don't see any blacksmith shop around here," observed Bob. "In fact, it wasn't far from here that we killed the calf, fellows."

"Don't mention it!" begged Jerry. "Well, I guess I'll take a chance, and go on slowly. We may come to a garage within a few miles, though I don't remember seeing any on our other trip."

As they were about to proceed, they saw a farmer driving toward them. He halted to learn the trouble, and to the delight of the boys announced that there was a smithy about a mile farther on, down a side road.

The blacksmith shop was soon reached, and while the proprietor was making the necessary repairs Jerry and his chums sat outside where a number of men were gathered, listening to their talk. Mr. Snodgrass, as has probably been guessed, was looking for bugs.

Quite a political discussion was under way among the loungers about the smithy, when Ned, looking down the village street, saw a figure approaching. There was something vaguely familiar about it. The merchant's son nudged Jerry.

"Isn't that our friend Mr. Sackett, of Tewkesbury Township?" he asked in a low voice.

"It sure is," agreed the tall lad after a moment's inspection.

"He's coming here."

"Well, what of it?"

"Shall we tackle him about that calf?"

"By jinks! I've a good notion to. Wait until he gets here, and we'll see if he knows us."

Mr. Sackett came on with a shuffling gait. He did not seem to observe the three boys, and they were thinking in what manner they could get even with the miser for the mean trick he had played on them, when the grizzled old farmer, address-

ing one of the men outside the blacksmith shop, said:

"Well, Jason Stearn, have ye made up yer mind t' take my flock of buff Cochins? I've got t' know right away, fer I've got another offer fer 'em, an' I can't wait on ye any longer. There's two hundred of th' finest hens in Tewkesbury Township, an' I'm lettin' ye have 'em at a bargain."

Jerry and his chums were all attention at this, and as the miserly farmer had not yet noticed them, Jerry pulled Ned and Bob out of sight behind a wagon, slipping along with them himself. From this vantage point they listened.

"Do ye want 'em, Jason?" went on Mr. Sackett.

"Wa'al, I've been thinkin' of it, Eb," drawled the man addressed. "I want t' git some nice hens, an' I like th' Cochins as well as any. What's yer lowest figger?"

"One hundred an' fifty dollars, jest as I told ye afore. They're wuth two hundred ef they're wuth a cent—an' that's only a dollar apiece—cheap fer buff Cochins. Ye'll have t' speak mighty soon, ef ye want 'em. I come down this way special t' see ye."

"I'll give ye a hundred an' forty, Eb."

"All right, I'll take ye!" exclaimed the miserly farmer quickly. "Cash down, mind ye."

"Yes, I'm willin' t' pay cash," agreed Mr.

Stearn.

"An' ye'll have t' pay suthin' now, t' bind the bargain," went on Mr. Sackett eagerly. "Newt Porter an' Si Granberry will be witnesses that ye agreed t' take 'em."

"All right, Eb. Here's ten dollars. I'll pay ye th' rest when I come fer th' fowls."

Mr. Stearn was about to pass over a ten-dollar bill to Mr. Sackett when Jerry, with a nudge to his companions, stepped from behind the wagon, and confronted the miser.

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Stearn," said the tall lad calmly, "I wouldn't buy those chickens, if I were you."

"Not buy those chickens? Why not?" asked the prospective purchaser. "They're a good flock, ain't they?"

"No, they're not," put in Ned.

"They're diseased and will die inside of a month," added Bob.

"Say, consarn ye! Who be you fellers, any-how, puttin' in yer oars where ye ain't wanted, an' tryin' t' spoil a man's trade?" demanded Mr. Sackett with a snarl.

"Oh, I guess you know who we are well enough," spoke Jerry calmly, as he stepped into plainer view. "We bought a calf of you at rather a high price the other day, Mr. Sackett, and afterward learned that you were ordered to kill it!"

"Oh, them's th' fellers, eh?" remarked Mr. Stearn, while as for the miserly farmer, he started back in alarm at the sight of our heroes.

"What's that calf got t' do with my chickens?" he demanded roughly.

"Those fowls are diseased, just as the calf was, and you know that your chickens have been condemned, Mr. Sackett. You've been ordered by the health department to get rid of them, and this is the means you take—trying to sell them to some one who will lose them all within a month.

"Don't buy those chickens, Mr. Stearn," went on Jerry eagerly. "We met Mr. Rider, the health inspector, a little while ago, and he told us the whole story. It was he who told us about the condemned calf we accidentally killed. Mr. Rider will be here in a few days to see that the flock of Cochins are disposed of, and if you don't want to throw your money away, don't buy them!"

"That's not so!" cried Mr. Sackett. "You're tryin' t' make trouble fer me!"

"It is true," declared Jerry quietly. "My two friends here heard the story, and so did Professor Snodgrass. I'll call the professor," which he did, from down the road where the scientist was looking for strange insects.

"It is perfectly true," declared Mr. Snodgrass, "and I'm glad we are in time to prevent you from cheating some one else, Mr. Sackett. If you sell those diseased chickens it will be a swindle."

"Wa'al, they ain't all sick," asserted the farmer lamely, "an' I'm willin' t' make a reduction, ef you'll take 'em, Jason. I tell ye they're fine fowl!"

This was practically an admission that the story of our heroes was true, and Mr. Stearn felt it to be so. He put his money back into his pocket.

"I guess we can't do no business, Eb," he remarked dryly. "I'm much obliged to you young fellers fer warnin' me in time. I'd a-been badly stuck, with a lot of diseased hens on my hands. What do you mean by tryin' such a trick, Eb Sackett?"

"Wa'al, I didn't know th' hens was as bad as

that," was the evasive answer. "I ain't had no official notice t' that effect."

"You knew it well enough, though," declared Jerry decisively.

"Wa'al, consarn ye, what right have ye got t' be mindin' my business an' that of Jason Stearn fer, I'd like to know?" demanded the angry miser, seeing his plans foiled.

"We've got every honest right," answered Ned.

"Besides, you made us pay for a calf that was no good," put in Bob.

"Oh! I wish I had holt of ye out at my place fer about five minutes!" muttered the angry man, as he shook his fist at the boys, and turned away, followed by the laughter of the loungers, who were glad to see this turn to events. "I'd make ye smart fer this," declared Mr. Sackett, as he went back the way he had come. "Spoilin' a man's business this way. Them chickens is good enough fer anybody!"

"Then you keep 'em," answered Mr. Stearn, as he again thanked the boys for the service they had done him.

"I rather guess this makes us about even on the calf deal," observed Jerry grimly.

Later they learned that Mr. Sackett tried elsewhere, but unsuccessfully, to dispose of his fowls, and finally they all died on his hands, after he had spent considerable for medicine to cure them.

CHAPTER X

REBUILDING THE COMET

"WHERE's that monkey wrench?"

"Say, has anybody seen my ruler?"

"Hand over that hammer, will you, Bob?"

"Look out there, Jerry, or that piece of scantling will be down on your head!"

"Give me a hand here, somebody, I can't shift this exhaust pipe all alone."

"Hey! Don't put your foot through those hydroplanes, Ned. Do you want to break 'em?"

These were only a few of the expressions, commands, entreaties and warnings that could be heard coming from the big barn, back of the home of Jerry Hopkins, where, a few days after the arrival of our heroes from their trip to Durham, they began work at rebuilding the *Comet*. They had decided on making several minor changes to their motor-ship, in addition to equipping it for work on the water, and they found the task a little harder than anticipated.

But they succeeded in getting the help of Mr.

Glassford, who had originally planned the Comet, and such assistance did he give, together with that of some trained mechanics whom he hired, that it seemed possible to make at least a trial trip in about another week.

"And then we'll sail for the balloon and aeroplane meet at Danforth," remarked Jerry, pausing in the work of building the hydroplanes, for that was his special feature, and he wanted to have them just right.

"I only hope Mr. Jackson stays there until we arrive," spoke Ned. "He's so queer that he may leave at any time, and then we'll have another chase after him."

"Oh, he'll stay until the races start at least, I think, fellows," said Bob. "You know the secretary of the meet wrote us that Mr. Jackson was going to try for a prize in his new dirigible balloon, and he won't go away without making a flight. The meet is delayed in opening, you know, and I think we have plenty of time."

"If we hadn't, I wouldn't have proposed going this way," came from Jerry. "We could go out in a train or by auto, and get to him more quickly than by delaying to rebuild our airship. But I thought, as long as we did have the time we might just as well make an air trip."

"Sure," agreed Ned. "Besides I think if we arrive at the meet in the Comet it will create something of a sensation, and if Mr. Jackson is there he'll be more apt to think we are 'some pumpkins' than if we arrived by train or auto."

"Was your father much disappointed that we didn't land him in Durham, and get him to sign

the papers?" asked Bob.

"He sure was, Chunky," replied the merchant's son. "But he knew it wasn't our fault. He has great hopes from our trip to Danforth, how ver."

"Any let-up in his business troubles?" inquired

Jerry.

"No, they're worse, if anything. Dad's enemies are pressing him hard, but he thinks he can stand them off until we get to Mr. Jackson, and enlist his aid. It's going to be quite a task, though. Poor dad! I wish I could help him!"

"You are helping him!" insisted the fat youth, as he stopped to rest after carrying a brace across the barn to where it was to be fitted into the airship. "You are doing all you can, and we're helping you."

"I realize that, and I can't thank you fellows enough," spoke Ned feelingly, for his father's troubles had made quite an impression on the lad, as, indeed, they also had on his chums, and they were all anxious to see them over. In fact, if they were not speedily remedied it meant the loss of Mr. Slade's fortune, which he had made by a lifetime of hard work.

So they were anxious to have the Comet refitted, and start off on their trip to a point near New York in order to meet Mr. Jackson. They had learned by telegraph that the eccentric promoter and millionaire was expected to arrive any day, and would take part in the meet. Efforts to intercept him en route, and get in communication with him, had been futile, and they were forced to wait. Mr. Slade grew more and more anxious as the days passed, but he could only fight off his business and financial enemies as best he might.

They were busy days for the motor boys. Early and late they worked on the Comet. The main cabin was enlarged and improved. The engine and machinery was overhauled, and made more powerful. The gas-generating machine, which supplied the lifting vapor, that was used when it was not desired to operate the Comet as an aeroplane, was changed to allow a more powerful gas to be used.

Additional room for carrying provisions and stores was provided, and a number of comforts were added to the motor-ship's equipment.

But the hydroplane attachments were the most radical. As has been explained they enabled the airship to alight on water and float there, and Jerry even added an auxiliary propeller so that the motor-ship could travel in the water for a short distance.

So that, in reality, the *Comet* would soon be a craft that could roll along the ground, on the bicycle or starting wheels; it could sail through the air, or skim on the surface of the water.

"Well, fellows," remarked Jerry one afternoon, when all, including Mr. Glassford and his helpers, had put in a hard day's work on the craft, "I think we'll have her in shape in another day. Then we can give her a try-out."

"Where?" asked Mr. Glassford. "You ought to test her on some water, for you are sure enough that the air features are all right. It's the hydroplanes that need testing."

"That's true," admitted Jerry, "and I thought of making a trip through the air to Lake Hammond, and dropping down on the surface there."

"Good idea," agreed Ned.

They were about to stop, assuring themselves

by an inspection of the craft that at least one day more would put her in shape for a trial in the air and on water, when into the barn, that was used as a work-shop, there burst a small chap, with every appearance of great excitement oozing out from almost every pore in his body.

"Jerry! Ned! Bob!" he gasped. "Come quick—he's out there—stuck fast—can't get loose—squirming around—down in a hole—sea-serpent I guess—almost dead—Oh, it's awful—poor man—get a doctor—send for an ambulance—have a trained nurse—come on, everybody! Don't wait a minute! He'll disappear under ground! Come quick! Hurry! Run! Run! Come on!"

"Well, for the love of cats, Andy Rush, what in the name of the sacred cow is the matter now?" cried Jerry, as he surveyed the excitable lad who had burst in on them.

"Come on! Come on, quick!" was all the reply Andy made and he turned and hastened from the barn, followed by Ned, Bob and the others.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE WATER

HASTENING as rapidly as they could after the excitable lad, our three heroes, with Mr. Glassford and his men turned the corner of the barn, and were soon in the fields back of Jerry's house.

"Where are you taking us, Andy?" cried Ned.

"Yes, what's the trouble, anyhow?" demanded Jerry.

"Let—up—I'm—winded!" panted the fat

"Come on—he's right near, now—Oh, I hope we're in time—run!"

That was all the answer Andy Rush gave, but it was sufficient, for a few seconds later they came in sight of the cause of his excitement.

A man was lying prone on the grass of the meadow near the edge of a small brook. He was stretched out at full length and one arm and hand seemed to be in a deep hole.

"Why, it's Professor Snodgrass!" exclaimed Ned, as he recognized the scientist.

"I told you—that's him—caught in a hole—help him out—send for a doctor!" spluttered Andy, dancing around first on one leg and then on the other.

"Be quiet; can't you?" pleaded Jerry.

"Sure I can. But I saw him—I ran for help—I knew something was the matter—he called to me as I was passing through the field—he's going to die, I guess!"

"Oh, guess again!" cried Ned, for Andy's excitable nature was getting on the nerves of them all.

Jerry ran to where Professor Snodgrass was lying face down in the grass. There was a look of mild wonder on the countenance of the scientist.

"What's the matter?" asked the tall lad. "Are you sick, Mr. Snodgrass?"

"Sick? No, Jerry. But I'm in trouble."

"Trouble? What is it?" asked Mr. Glassford solicitously. "Can we help you? You seem to be caught in the hole."

"No, I have caught something in the hole, to be more correct," spoke the professor calmly. "Only he won't let go, and I can't pull him out, or get my hand loose."

"What is it?" asked Ned.

"A large mud turtle of a very rare variety," was the reply. "I was walking along, looking for specimens, and I saw this one crawling on the bank of the brook. I made a grab for him, just as he was sliding into a muskrat's hole, and got him by the tail. However, he managed to get into the opening a little way, and as my hand kept slipping from his tail, I had to reach farther and farther in, until my whole arm, up to the shoulder, is down the hole, as you can see."

"Well, why don't you pull your arm up?"

asked one of Mr. Glassford's helpers.

"I can't," replied the professor simply. "You see the turtle has hold of my hand, and won't let go."

"How can he have hold of your hand, when

you have him by the tail?" asked Jerry.

"Oh, I haven't got hold of his tail now," explained Mr. Snodgrass, as if it was the most simple thing in the world. "You see after he got down the hole he pulled loose his tail from my grasp, turned around, and before I knew it he had my hand in his mouth. That's why I can't pull my arm up. I have to lie here. In fact, I've been here some time, and when I saw this young man passing by I asked him to go for help," and the professor indicated Andy.

"And I went—I ran—I jumped!" exclaimed the small chap. "I told the news—I brought help—I——"

"That'll do, Andy," said Ned gently, and the excitable lad subsided.

"We'll soon help you!" said Mr. Glassford to the scientist. "Here," he called to his two assistants. "Get some sticks, dig down through the earth to where the turtle has hold of this gentleman, and kill it."

"Oh, no! Don't, I beg of you! Not for worlds! Don't kill it!" cried the professor. "It is a very valuable specimen, and I may never be able to get another like it."

"But it is biting your hand!" cried Jerry.

"You may get blood poison," added Ned.

"Oh, I have a heavy glove on," explained the scientist, "and he can't hurt me. But I wish you would dig him out, and then I could get him. But don't hurt him. He'll hold on until then, I guess, and really I don't mind it a bit."

"But you'll get tired lying there," objected Bob.

"Oh, no," declared the professor simply. "I would be willing to lie here all night this way, for the sake of getting such a fine specimen."

There was no getting him to change his mind,

or slip off his glove, and let the turtle go. So shovels were sent for, and, after some work, the hole was made larger, until the professor was able to put in his other arm and pull out the turtle.

"Oh, you little beauty!" he exclaimed, as he held up the wiggling reptile. "You are indeed valuable! Why that specimen is worth at least fifty dollars!" he said.

"I know a pond full of 'em, and I'll give you all you want for a quarter," said one of Mr. Glassford's men.

"Not this kind," asserted the professor proudly, as he bore off his prize.

"Will you give me a ride in the airship, for bringing you news of the professor?" asked Andy, as he walked back with the boys. He had calmed down somewhat.

"Sure we will," agreed Jerry. "You can come on the trial trip we're going to take to-morrow or next day—if you promise not to yell in case we fall."

"All right—I promise," said Andy, after thinking it over.

Uriah Snodgrass, who was stopping at Jerry's house pending the start for Danforth, suffered no ill effects from his experience with the turtle,

and the next day was hunting new specimens with as much energy as before. He was anxious to get started on his quest for the singing fish, but, in the meanwhile, occupied himself as best he could.

It was found impossible to get the Comet in readiness for a trial the next day, but on the following one, when the last adjustments had been made to the machinery, Jerry decided that it would be safe to risk a flight. Mr. Glassford and his men had completed their work, and departed, and our three heroes, together with Andy Rush and Professor Snodgrass, made up the party that entered the cabin of the motor-ship after it was wheeled out of the barn.

The hydroplanes which were on toggle-joint arms had been lifted up off the ground, and could be let down when it was desired to float on water.

"I think we'll go up by means of the gas bag, and not use the aeroplane wings now," decided Jerry. "We haven't room enough to get a good start, now that the *Comet* is larger than she was formerly."

Accordingly the vapor machine was set in operation, and soon a hissing announced that the gas was entering the big bag that formed the superstructure of the *Comet*. Some of the boys'

friends had gathered to see them off, and Mr. Slade was present, for he was vitally interested in the success of the remodelled motor-ship.

"How's the pressure?" called Jerry to Ned, who was in the engine room, while the tall lad took his place in the steering house.

"About five hundred pounds," was the reply. "That's enough. We're ready to go up. Andy, you help Bob cast off the anchor ropes. Professor—"

"Oh, there's no use asking him to do anything," spoke Bob in a low voice to his chum. "He's just seen a new kind of a bug crawling around on deck, and he's after it on his hands and knees."

"All right, I guess we won't disturb him then," decided the tall lad. "We can manage. Get ready to cast off, Chunky."

A little more gas was allowed to go into the bag. The motor-ship was pulling and tugging at the anchor ropes, as if eager to be free to rise in the air.

"Let her go!" suddenly called Jerry.

Bob and Andy released the ropes, and the Comet shot up with the swiftness of a rocket.

"Say, she's got more speed than she used to have," exclaimed Ned from the engine-room, as he adjusted levers and gear wheels. "I thought the new gas machine would do the trick," said Jerry rather proudly.

He started the big propellers, and soon the motor-ship, instead of shooting straight up, like a balloon, darted forward, like an aeroplane. Faster and faster she went, until the cheers of the little crowd below could be no longer heard.

"Where are you heading?" asked Bob, as, followed by Andy Rush, he entered the steering house, where Jerry was busy with various levers, handles and valve wheels.

"Straight for Lake Hammond," was the answer. "We'll be there in half an hour, and then we can see how the hydroplanes work."

The Comet was not pushed to her full speed, as some of the machinery was new, and the boys wanted to see how it would work. They found that it was doing satisfactorily, however, and the various new appliances they had added were very successful.

They were flying along at a moderate height, looking for a sight of Lake Hammond, a large body of water about twenty miles from Cresville. Bob, Ned and Jerry found plenty to do, but Andy Rush was as good as his name, rushing here and there, exclaiming in delight at the scenery that seemed to be slipping along beneath him.

"It's great—marvellous—wonderful!" he exploded.

"Remember what I told you," cautioned Jerry.

"What's that?"

"You're not to yell if we fall."

"All right—I won't."

The speed of the motor-ship was now increased, and she was skimming along through the air, almost up to the limit of her previous record before the changes were made. Jerry knew, however, that she could go much faster when urged.

In a few minutes Andy, who was looking from one of the forward windows, cried out:

"I see the lake! There she is!"

Jerry, who had set the automatic steering apparatus, and who had left the wheel, hastened forward.

"Yes, there's Lake Hammond," he agreed. "We'll be floating on the surface in a few minutes if all goes well. Slow down, Ned."

They were all soon busy over the machinery, and when the craft had been brought to slower speed they glanced down, and saw the shining waters of the lake below them. Several rowboats and motor craft were on it, and in the distance was a yacht.

"Are you all ready for the trial?" called Jerry, with his hand on the lever that would let out the gas, and cause a descent.

"All ready," answered Ned, and his voice was a trifle solemn. Suppose the hydroplanes should not work?

"Here we go then!" announced the tall lad. He yanked the lever toward him. There was a hissing sound, and the *Comet*, whose propellers had ceased revolving, shot downward.

With a quick motion Jerry straightened out the toggle-jointed arms that held the hydroplanes. They slipped into place, as the bicycle wheels moved out of the way.

A few seconds later the *Comet*, with a little splash, had settled down upon the surface of the lake as gracefully as a wild swan, and floated as gently and as lightly as a cork.

"Hurrah!" cried Jerry. "She floats! She

"Will she move?" asked Bob.

"We'll soon see," and Jerry started the water propeller:

Slowly at first, and then gathering speed, the motor-ship adapted herself to the watery element as well as she had to the earth or air.

"Success!" murmured Ned, while from the motor-boats on the lake came shrill whistles of greeting to the new and strange craft that had so unexpectedly appeared among them.

CHAPTER XII

IN PERIL

"SAY, isn't this great?" demanded Jerry of his companions, as he stood in the steering house, and directed the course of the *Comet* on the lake. "I guess now you agree with me, don't you, Bob, that the hydroplanes are all right?"

"Yes, they are," admitted the stout lad. "I didn't think they'd work so well."

"Me, either," spoke Ned. "They'll be all right in case we have to go over some part of the ocean, or a large body of water, and something happens so that we have to descend."

"I hope we will very soon be over the ocean," remarked Mr. Snodgrass earnestly, as he came forward, holding in his hand a little bug, of which he seemed to take great care. He had been so interested in its capture that he had taken little notice of the landing on the lake.

"We'll try a flight over the water, perhaps a trip out to sea for a few miles, and back again,"

said Jerry. "Now that it works all right, I'm not afraid to go anywhere in the Comet."

"But first we go to Danforth," said Ned.

"Of course, to see Mr. Jackson. There's no reason why we can't start to-morrow or the next day," said the tall lad.

"We can't get the grub and other things on board in that time," objected Bob.

"Yes, we can, if we leave the eating part to you," declared Ned. "You'll see that there's plenty of canned chicken and stuff like that, and Jerry and I can hustle in the stores, gasolene and supplies. Maybe we could start to-morrow, fellows."

"I'll do my share," agreed the fat lad.

"It's rather too short notice," objected Jerry. "But we can start in two or three days. I'll have to make a few little changes in the machinery, and we'll be all right then."

"All I care about is getting the singing fish," spoke Professor Snodgrass, scanning the surface of the lake as if he might sight a specimen there.

The Comet was moving slowly over the water. It was not built for very great speed in that element, being designed for use in the air, but it made fairly good progress. By using the air propellers it could be made to go much faster, and

they would be put into operation when it was designed to get a flying start so that the wing planes would lift the craft up.

But now only the water propeller was being used, and as the *Comet* glided along she was soon surrounded by many other craft, the occupants of which wanted to know what kind of a boat the boys had.

Their curiosity was satisfied in a measure, and one enthusiastic motor-boat owner wanted to race.

"I'm afraid we're not in your class," objected Jerry. "If you wait a few minutes, though, we'll make an ascension, and then we'll accept the challenge."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be in it then," answered the motor-boat man with a laugh. "But you sure have a great craft there."

"We'll try the air propellers now," went on Jerry, "and see if we can get up speed enough to rise into the air without using the gas bag. That's a point of which I am still in doubt."

"Supposing we don't rise?" asked Bob.

"Oh, well, then we can force gas into the bag. But I'd like to try the wings now, and see how they work since we changed the shape and the angle of inclination."

"Go ahead," called Ned, and he and Bob

helped Jerry to get the machinery ready for the new test. The water propeller was stopped, and soon the air ones were whirring around like blurs of light.

"Clear the way!" yelled Jerry to a little flotilla of rowing and motor craft that were in the path he proposed to take in skimming over the surface of the water. "Clear the way, or we may run you down!"

The boats made haste to pull to one side or the other, leaving a lane along which the *Comet* could dash before mounting up into the air.

Faster and faster went the propellers. The motor-ship gathered way. It was sliding over the surface now on the hydroplanes, which were like little boats, or the runners of an ice yacht. More and more speed did the *Comet* develop.

"I guess she'll do it," murmured Jerry. "I'll tilt the elevation rudder in a few seconds and then—well, we'll see what will happen."

He looked ahead over the water course. The craft was making considerable progress then, in a straight line. Jerry reached for the lever that controlled the rudder which would send them aloft. He glanced at the speed register and noted that they had not yet reached sufficient momentum.

Suddenly, from the lee of a large sailing yacht that had come to anchor out of the path of the Comet to watch the test, there shot a rowboat containing a girl and a lady. Right in the path of the oncoming motor-ship was the small boat.

"Look out!" yelled Jerry through a megaphone.

"Pull to one side," added Ned, though they could not hear his voice above the noise of the engine.

"Row out! Row to one side!" cried Jerry again. "We'll run you down! We can't steer to the right or left without capsizing!"

This was true, for to swerve the motor-ship off a straight course at the speed at which she was going would have meant disaster.

"Look out! Look out!" yelled Jerry desperately, waving his arms in warning. The sailors on the yacht now added their voices to those aboard the *Comet*, and the woman and girl became confused. Each one had an oar, and they were not pulling together.

All at once the girl lost her blade overboard, and the lady, pulling on hers, sent the rowboat about in a circle. Around it spun, right in the path of the oncoming *Comet*.

"Slow up! Go to the left—no the right—back

up—we'll be killed—they'll be killed—jump over them—up in the air—do something!" yelled Andy Rush.

"Quiet!" shouted Jerry. He saw that it would be useless to call further to the occupants of the rowboat. They were helpless. Nor did it seem possible to stop the *Comet* in time, though Jerry had his hand on the reverse lever. Even at slackened speed, if they hit the small boat, they would upset it, either killing the occupants or throwing them into the water. And there was grave danger to the comparatively frail *Comet*, in the event of a collision.

CHAPTER XIII

OFF TO THE MEET

JERRY HOPKINS made up his mind that there was but one thing to do. It was utterly out of the question to stop in time now, or to swerve from the direct path, in which was the small boat.

"We've got to jump over them!" murmured the tall lad to himself. "We've hardly speed enough to rise, yet I've got to chance it. If I don't——"

He dared not think of the alternative. With a quick motion he threw the lever of the motor over as far as it would go. It meant full speed ahead, and with a rush and a roar, a rumbling and trembling, the powerful machine took up the extra fuel that was thrown into it.

"It's now or never!" murmured the steersman, while the occupants of the motor-ship gazed ahead with fear-filled eyes. In the small boat crouched the woman and girl, while on board the sailing yacht a man was vainly reaching out with

a landing hook, endeavoring to pull the little craft out of danger.

"Now!" suddenly shouted Jerry as if he was calling to some one, and he yanked the elevation rudder lever toward him.

Like a thing alive the Comet seemed to lift herself from the surface of the water. The front end was elevated, the forward hydroplanes emerging dripping from the liquid element. Now they were almost over the rowboat, in the bottom of which, clinging to each other in terror, were the two trembling occupants.

Would the rear end of the airship—the big after-hydroplanes clear them; or would they dash them to death?

This was the question that every one on board the *Comet* was asking himself, Jerry most anxiously of all, for it was his desperate plan that was being tried. Yet there was no other way.

With a whizzing and a rushing sound the motor-ship lifted herself from the lake. Upward and upward she mounted, the rear hydroplanes being now clear of the water. In another moment the airship passed over the heads of those in the rowboat, clearing them by about five feet, as Jerry and his chums learned afterward. They could not see what took place below them and di-

rectly in the rear, but when they were well up in the air, by looking back, they could see the woman and the girl in the boat, unharmed. There was a prayer of thankfulness in every heart.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jerry, as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and slowed down the speed of the motor. "I wouldn't go through such an experience again for a million dollars."

"Me either," chimed in Ned. "I thought they were goners, as well as ourselves."

"It was a narrow squeak," added Bob. "They came out directly in our path."

"Well, they didn't mean to," suggested the tall lad. "I guess they were as badly frightened as we were. But the *Comet* did herself proud on this occasion."

"And you handled your craft most excellently," complimented Professor Snodgrass, who, during the recent excitement, had remained a mute spectator. "I never saw better nerve displayed, Jerry, my boy."

"Oh, well, it was the only thing to do," was the modest answer. "I guess we'll head for home now, and get a nerve-bracer in the shape of some ice-cream soda, or something like that; eh, fellows?"

"Sure," agreed Bob and Ned.

"Wow! Nothing like it—scoot along—over the water—up in the air—jump over their heads—down again—sail along—turn a somersault—rush at 'em—scare 'em to death—whoop-dedoodle do! Wow!" Andy Rush was fairly quivering with poorly-repressed excitement.

They reached Cresville without further incident, made a good landing, and received the congratulation of many friends who gathered around the barn on Jerry's premises, as soon as it was learned that the *Comet* had returned.

"Did it work all right?" Mr. Slade was anxious to know.

"Couldn't be better, dad," replied his son.

"Then are you soon going—" The merchant did not finish, but they knew what he meant.

Mr. Slade was exceedingly anxious to get into communication with Mr. Jackson, and his son, seeing a worried look on his parent's face, asked:

"Are things any worse, dad?"

"Well, they're no better," was the reply, "and I fear there is some new move afoot on the part of those who are trying to ruin me. If I don't get help soon it will be too late."

"We'll leave for Danforth day after to-morrow," decided Jerry on hearing this.

"Can we be ready in time?" asked Ned.

"We'll have to," was the grim retort. "I'll let you and Bob attend to the storing of the provisions and supplies, and I'll tinker with the machinery. We can do it if we hustle, and hustle we will. Meanwhile you might send a telegram to the authorities of the meet, asking if Mr. Jackson has arrived yet, and if he has, request them to tell him to wait until we get there, as we have an important message for him."

Ned did this, and received a reply to the effect that Mr. Jackson had not yet arrived. It was stated, however, that his dirigible balloon was on the ground, and that his employées were getting it in shape for a flight on the opening day of the aeroplane carnival, which was four days off.

"Oh, then we'll be in plenty of time," declared Jerry. "There is always some delay in these affairs, and, once we get started in the *Comet* we can make all kinds of fast time. You needn't worry about it, Mr. Slade."

But the merchant could not help worrying, for his business affairs were in dire straits.

The adjusting of the machinery, and the fitting out of the motor-ship for the coming voyage, proceeded rapidly. Bob, to whom was left the purchasing of the provisions, was in his element.

The last work had been done, the last box put

aboard, and the final adjustment made to the machinery. The Comet was ready to leave.

Early in the morning, before a crowd of curiosity-seekers had had time to gather, our heroes and Professor Snodgrass entered the cabin. The parents of the boys were there to say good-bye.

"All ready?" called Jerry to his chums.

"All ready," came the answer.

There was a hissing sound as the gas rushed into the big bag, a straining of the holding ropes, and then, as they were cast off, the motor-ship rose into the air. Jerry started the propellers.

"Off at last!" exclaimed Ned, waving his hand to his father.

"And may we be successful!" murmured Jerry.
A small figure dashed up the street. Off came
a hat which was waved in the air. Then came a
shrill cheer.

"There they go! Off in the air—rush along—never say die—blow up—no matter—on again—that's the stuff! Good luck! Good-bye!"

"No need to look to see who that is," remarked Jerry, as he put on a little more speed, and the *Comet* pointed her sharp nose toward the place of the balloon meet, where our friends hoped to get the aid of the man who could save Mr. Slade from ruin.

CHAPTER XIV

A PRECARIOUS POSITION

AIRSHIP travel was scarcely a novelty to our heroes now, but, like many other things, there was always some new feature to it. Just as on an auto trip you never can tell what is going to happen, and just as two auto trips are never the same, so with travel in a motor-ship.

"We may start off all right, and we may get there all right," said Jerry, "but you never can tell what is going to happen in the meanwhile."

The start of our friends was auspicious enough. Rising high above the country surrounding their home town, they soon found themselves in a favorable current, and then, allowing some of the gas to flow out of the bag, and into the compression container, Jerry speeded up the propellers so that the *Comet* was sailing along now as a regular aeroplane, depending on her forward motion and on the pressure of air on the surfaces of the wing planes for support.

"We want to get used to travelling both ways,"

remarked Jerry to his chums, "for it will be wise to save our gas for emergencies. Anyhow the Comet is as good an aeroplane as she is a dirigible balloon, and we can go faster in the former shape, as there is not so much air resistance when the gas bag is not fully inflated."

There were many small tasks to do after they had gotten well under way, and the better part of the morning was taken up in performing them. Jerry looked to the machinery, which, in spite of several adjustments, needed some attention. Bob saw to it that his provisions were all in place, and Ned checked over his stores, to make sure he had forgotten nothing.

As for Uriah Snodgrass, it mattered little to him where he was, whether in the air, or on the earth or water, save that in the air there were not so many chances of gathering specimens. However, when he could not capture bugs he could look over those already in his specimen boxes, arrange and classify them, and jot down notes concerning them. It was this latter work which now occupied him.

"Where is Mr. Snodgrass?" asked Ned when Bob, after a time spent in the kitchen, announced supper.

"He was in the main cabin a few minutes ago, writing in his note-book," said Jerry. "I saw him as I passed through."

A glance into the cabin showed that the professor was not there.

"Perhaps he's already eating, in the diningroom," remarked Bob. "He might have gotten hungry, and couldn't wait."

"Oh, I guess he's not like you," retorted Ned. Still he looked into the cabin where the table was set, but no scientist appeared. The motor room was equally unproductive, and the boys now looked anxiously at one another.

"Can he have fallen overboard?" asked Bob, his voice trembling with apprehension.

"We'd have heard him cry if he fell," said Jerry. Still, he went to the rail and looked down. They were passing over a broad stretch of meadow land, and there was no evidence that their friend had tumbled down.

"The storeroom," suggested Ned. They hurried there, but found no professor!

Suddenly Bob, who had gone out on the after deck, uttered a cry of alarm. His companions hastened toward him, and looked to where he pointed.

There, lying face downward on the projecting stern of the motor-ship, his head and shoulders out of sight, was the missing professor, in a most precarious position!

CHAPTER XV

BOMBARDED WITH ROCKETS

"GRAB his legs!" cried Jerry. "I'll take one, and you the other, 'Ned! Bob, you stand by to help! He's almost overboard!"

"Hadn't you better slow up the engine?" asked Ned.

"No, we've only got headway enough on now to keep us afloat! No time to slow up!"

"Then go down!" advised Bob. "He won't fall so far."

"No, we've got to pull him back right away!" declared the tall lad. "Come on now. He must have fainted, and has very nearly fallen off. Grab his legs! Quick!"

Cautiously the three lads advanced toward the edge of the platform, over which the professor's head and shoulders were hanging.

Jerry made a grab for the left leg, Ned for the right, while the stout lad stood ready to lend whatever assistance might be needed.

No sooner, however, had Ned and Jerry gotten

a good hold, and were about to haul in, than the professor, with a combination wiggle and squirm turned over, hitched himself along the deck, sat upright and yelled:

"I've got it! I've got it! Oh, you little beauty! Oh, you prize! I thought you'd never come near enough but you did, and now you're mine!"

Over his head he swung his large butterfly net, with a long handle, and before the astonished boys could ask what was the meaning of his conduct, the scientist gathered into a small space in a pocket in the bottom of the net, a tiny insect, something like a dragon-fly. Then, having insured the safety of his specimen, Mr. Snodgrass looked calmly at the boys who stood regarding him with amazement and fear mingled on their faces.

"Well, I got it," said the scientist coolly.

"Got what?" asked Jerry, a little provoked at the scare they had received.

"This high-flying June bug. That's not the scientific name for it, but the Latin one is so long you wouldn't understand it. I've got him!" and the professor eagerly peered at his prize.

"We thought we had lost you," spoke Ned significantly.

"Lost me-how?"

"Why, when we saw you lying over the edge of the deck we were afraid you had nearly fallen overboard."

"I'm sorry you had such a scare on my account," remarked the professor more soberly. "You see I had no idea that I was causing you worry. I was sitting on the back of the airship, wishing I could catch some specimen, when I heard a buzzing sound. I looked, and there, following us was one of these rare insects.

"I at once got my longest-handled net, but when I tried to catch the little beauty it dodged me. Finally it went down just below us, and the only way I could reach it was to lie on my face, reach out and down as far as I could, and swoop for it."

"A mighty risky thing to do," commented Jerry, for in some matters the professor was like a child.

"I know it," the scientist agreed cheerfully. "Once I thought sure I was going to fall."

"How did it make you feel?" asked Bob, curious to know.

"Well, all I remember thinking is that the highflying June bug would get away, or that some other scientist would capture him. Then I managed to get it in my net, and just at that moment

you boys came along, and grabbed me by the legs."

"Well, please don't do it again," begged Jerry, trying not to smile.

"I won't," promised the professor.

"Supper's getting cold," observed Bob rue-fully. "Come on, I'm hungry!"

"Same old tune!" mocked Jerry, and there was a laugh that somewhat relieved the strain under which they were.

The professor did not seem to think he had taken any unusual risk, and he was so overjoyed at the capture of the rare insect, which was worth at least seventy-five dollars, according to his estimate, that the boys did not have the heart to speak of the great fright he had caused them.

After supper, when several matters had been looked to, the lamps were lighted, and the great search-lantern gotten in readiness. Soon its powerful glow was cutting the gathering darkness as the big airship glided forward through space.

"Well, morning will see us within a few miles of our destination," remarked Jerry, as he and his chums sat about the table in the main cabin. "Then we can make a quick run out to the aviation grounds, have a talk with Mr. Jackson, if

he's there, and if not we'll wait for him. Then, after we've seen him, we'll—"

"Start for the ocean, I hope," put in the professor, who was busy jotting notes down in his books. "I am very anxious to get after the singing fish."

"Yes, I think we'll chance an ocean trip," agreed Jerry. "But I guess I'd better go now and see how nearly we are keeping on our course," he added, for he had set the automatic steering apparatus, and, as they were flying rather low, he did not dare trust altogether to it, without an occasional adjustment.

He found, however, that they were within a point and a half of the way in which the nose of the craft should have been pointed, and, after correcting the error, which was caused by the lack of smoothness of the new machinery, Jerry was about to return to the cabin where the others were.

As he turned to leave the motor room, he noted that the height gauge indicated less than a quarter of a mile.

"It's pretty low," mused the youth, "but I guess we won't hit anything. To get higher I've got to increase the speed, and I don't want to do

that and strain the machinery. I guess this will do. In the morning——"

Jerry paused in the midst of his sentence. From somewhere outside there came a rushing, roaring sound, followed by a loud explosion.

"The gas bag!" was the first thought of the tall lad. "It's burst!"

"What's the matter?" he heard Ned and Bob crying from the cabin.

Jerry rushed out on deck, and, as he emerged a glare of light caught his eye. A fear of fire entered his mind, but, as he watched it, the glow seemed to die away. Not before, however, Jerry had noted that the gas bag, which was partly inflated, was intact. Nothing had happened to it.

"What was that?" demanded Ned, emerging from the main cabin, followed by Bob and the professor.

"Just what I'm trying to discover," replied the widow's son. "It sounded like——"

"There it goes again!" yelled Bob, as, with a whizz and a roar, a streak of fire passed by the airship, and burst into balls of vari-colored light just beyond the craft.

"Meteors!" shouted Ned.

"Falling stars, perhaps," agreed the professor.

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Jerry looked down, over the edge of the rail. Below him there was a great illumination.

"Look!" he cried to his companions. "We're over some city."

"And they're having a celebration," added Ned.

"And bombarding us with rockets," came from Bob. "Look out, here comes a sheaf of them," and, as he spoke, from somewhere down below on the earth there shot upward a fiery volcano of pyrotechnics, that seemed to be aimed directly at the motor-ship.

"They are shooting at us!" cried Jerry. "Quick! Out with the lights, or they'll set us on fire! Douse every glim!"

He rushed for the electric switches, followed by his companions, while the *Comet* forged slowly ahead through the rain of fire, the sparks from the rockets shooting all about her.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ANGRY FARMER

WITH a suddenness that was almost startling the incandescent lights on the Comet went out. The airship shot forward through the darkness shrouded in gloom—no, not completely, for the great search light still glowed, and that offered a mark for the hissing rockets and aerial bombs.

"Quick! Out with the search lantern!" yelled Jerry. "You put that out, Bob, while Ned and I get to work on the engine and send the ship up. Start the gas machine, Ned!"

"Will it be safe, with all this fire around us? It might explode."

"That's so. We'll have to depend on the planes to take us higher. I'll speed up the motor!"

"But why in the world are they firing at us?" cried Ned. "Hurry, Chunky, haven't you got that search light out yet? They can see to aim at us as long as it's going."

"I can't seem to shut it off!" cried the stout youth. "The lever is jammed."

"Give him a hand, Ned," called the tall lad.

"I can manage the motor all right."

"Look!" suddenly cried Ned, pointing to the rear as he and his chum managed to put out the light. "There is another airship following us!"

They all glanced to where he pointed. In the darkness they could see a long, illuminated shape

whizzing swiftly through the air.

"It's some sort of an aerial craft, all right," murmured Jerry. "I wonder if Noddy Nixon—?"

"See! They're firing rockets at her now," yelled Bob. "Say, the people down below must have some big objection to airships. First they fire at us, and then at the next aeroplane that comes along."

Jerry, who had set the motor at higher speed to take them out of the zone of rockets, uttered

an exclamation.

"I have it!" he cried. "I see through it now."

"What is it?" asked Ned.

"They took us for part of the illumination," went on the tall lad. "They fired at us to see if they could hit us, and——"

"They've hit that other airship!" shouted Bob,

pointing to it. "See! They've set it on fire! Oh, what an awful death those poor fellows aboard it will have!"

"Let's save them!" suggested the professor. "There's no one aboard her," put in Jerry

more calmly than any of the others.

"No one aboard her? Do you mean she's a runaway airship?" asked Ned.

"No, it isn't an airship at all. I'll tell you," and Jerry went to the engine-room, where he slowed down the motor, for the plan of putting out the lights had been effective, and no more rockets were shot at them.

"They took us for part of the celebration," went on Jerry when he returned. "They probably arranged to have some sort of a miniature, automatic airship sent up, aimed to go across the place above where the fireworks were being set off, but high in the air. Then it was the game to try and hit it with rockets."

This later was found to be the case.

"We came along, and they took us for the miniature craft and fired at us," Jerry continued. "It was all a mistake, but it was lucky they didn't hit us. They must be puzzled, though, to see the second airship coming along."

"Well, they've done for that one, anyhow!" cried Bob. "See, it's all afire!"

It was blazing fiercely, and beginning to descend, while a shower of rockets, and aerial bombs shot all around it. Our friends were now out of reach of the pyrotechnics, and ventured to turn on their lights again. Down below could be seen the place of the celebration, brilliantly illuminated, but the glow soon died out, and it was evident that the destruction of the miniature airship brought the affair to a close.

They did not get to sleep early, on account of the excitement, but finally Jerry suggested that they take turns going on duty in the motor room.

"For," said the tall lad, "we're flying low, and the machinery is so new that we can't altogether depend on the automatic steering gear. So, to avoid accidents, some one will have to be on watch all night."

Morning came, with nothing having happened, and Bob was about early, bustling here and there getting breakfast. They were eating it, taking occasional glimpses down at the country over which they were passing, and speculating on when they would arrive at the balloon meet, and what would happen when they got there, when, with a sudden-

ness that was terrifying, the Comet was jerked backward.

The big aircraft trembled from end to end, and shivered throughout her length. Next followed a series of jerks, and then came a ripping, rending, tearing and splintering sound, hearing which, Jerry, with fear on his face, leaped to his feet.

"What's the matter?" cried Ned.

"Have we blown up?" demanded Bob.

"My specimens!" shouted the professor, making a dive for his room, where he kept the boxes.

Jerry rushed out on deck, and looked down over the rail. The airship was now stationary, though the propellers were buzzing around, and the tall lad soon saw the reason for the sudden halt.

They were over a farmyard, and the anchor rope, to which was attached a grapple, with several prongs, had caught under the cornice of a large barn, holding the *Comet* securely. And, strewn on the earth, at one side of the structure, were splintered boards and pieces of timber that had been ripped off, as the dangling, sharp-pointed anchor had caught in the eaves and tore along, ripping off part of the roof. Then the



"YE DON'T STIR A STEP TILL YE COME DOWN AN' SETTLE FER TH' DAMAGE."



craft, as the anchor met a solid timber, had come to a stop.

As Jerry looked down, there rushed out from the farmhouse an angry farmer. In his hands he held a gun, which he pointed at the airship.

"Don't ye dare t' move!" he yelled. "Don't ye stir! I've got th' drop on ye, an' I'm goin' t' keep it! Ye don't stir a step till ye come down an' settle fer th' damage. Ye well-nigh ripped my barn apart, an' I jest had it fixed. Come down, ye rapscallions! Don't ye stir a step till ye pay me!"

He shook his gun menacingly.

"I guess we're not likely to stir, until we get the anchor loose, at any rate," remarked Jerry coolly, for he had gotten over his fright when he saw that the airship was not damaged.

Then, as the craft had no longer any forward motion, and as this is vitally necessary to every aeroplane, the *Comet* began to settle down rapidly, almost on the roof of the barn.

CHAPTER XVII

HELD PRISONERS.

"Look out or we'll turn turtle, if we hit the barn!" yelled Bob.

"Yes, we can't go down this way!" added Ned. "Do something!"

"All right, I'm going to start the gas machine," said Jerry. "Keep cool now, there's no danger. By Jinks! But we seem to be having all kinds of bad luck lately. First we kill a calf, and now we rip a barn apart. Well, it can't be helped."

The gas bag had been partly inflated ready for a landing at the balloon grounds, so that the Comet did not come down as rapidly as would otherwise have been the case. Jerry soon started the vapor machine, forcing more of the lifting gas into the container, and this further checked the descent.

Almost as lightly as the proverbial feather,

the Comet came down, resting on the ground near the barn. As soon as she settled to rest, the anchor also dropped beside her, for there being no longer any upward strain on the sharp points to force them into the wood, the weight pulled them out.

The farmer stood there defiantly, covering the boys with his gun, as they lined up on the deck of the airship, with Professor Snodgrass, his arms filled with specimen boxes, behind them, a puzzled look on his face.

"What d' ye mean, goin' around th' country, rippin' folks' barn apart?" demanded the farmer in surly tones.

"It was an accident," replied Jerry gently. "Our anchor and rope must have come loose, and were dragging along through the air."

"Come loose! I should say it did come loose!" spluttered the man. "So did nearly half my barn come loose! But I'll have satisfaction for it. Hey, Bill—Sam! Come here an' help me take care of these folks!"

He raised his voice and two husky hired men came running from the direction of the house which the boys could just make out through the trees of the orchard.

"Now then, grab 'em!" yelled the farmer,

pointing his gun first at Jerry, then at Bob and then at Ned, and then beginning at Jerry again. "Grab 'em!" he cried, "an' tie 'em up! There's plenty of clothes line, an' th' women folks ain't goin' t' wash t'-day."

The hired men, grinning in appreciation of the plight in which our friends found themselves, advanced slowly.

"There's no necessity for resorting to harsh measures," said Jerry with dignity. "We're not going to run away."

"I'll bet ye ain't!" chuckled the farmer. "Not when I git through with ye! Tie 'em up, Sam an' Bill."

"Look here!" cried Jerry, seeing that it did no good to be polite, "if you lay a hand on us, you'll get into trouble! We won't stand for any such treatment from you! The damage we did was accidental, and we're willing to pay——"

"That's what ye will! Pay, an' pay good an' proper!" interrupted the unpleasant farmer.

"What do you think it's worth?" asked Bob, as Jerry went to look and see if the strain of the anchor rope had done any harm to the airship.

"What do I think it's wuth? Why, a thousand dollars won't cover my damage! I jest had that barn repaired t' hold my crops, an' here ye come

along, an' rip it all t' smithereens! A thousand dollars—"

"What's that?" cried Jerry, reappearing at that moment. "A thousand dollars!"

"He says we damaged his barn that much," explained Bob.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the tall lad.

"No nonsense about it!" spluttered the farmer.

"An' ef ye don't settle I'll have ye arrested. Sam
an' Bill I reckon ye'd better git them cords ready
arter all."

"Why, we have only torn off a small piece of the cornice and some of the eaves," said Jerry, pointing to where the damage had been done.

"Hu! It's easy enough fer ye t' say that, young feller, but it ain't so easy t' git my barn fixed. Either ye pay me a thousand dollars, or ye go t' jail, th' hull three of ye—no, by gum! There's another one of ye—there's four!" as he caught sight of the professor who, seeing that he could be of no service, was calmly looking over his note-books. "Is he yer father?" asked the farmer. "If he is, he can pay th' damage. Folks what go about in airships must have lots of money."

"No, he's not our father," replied Jerry shortly, "and we haven't lots of money. We are

willing to pay you a reasonable sum for damaging your barn, but a thousand dollars is out of the question."

"It is, eh? Well, mebby when ye've been in jail a couple of days ye won't think so. Sam an' Bill, take 'em, an' tie 'em, while I hitch up, an' git ready t' bring 'em over t' Lafayette, t' th' court house. I'll show 'em they can't make no monkey of me!"

"Nature did that for you," murmured Ned, "and saved us the trouble."

The two hired men, one of whom had secured a clothes line, now advanced on our friends. The farmer stood ready to back them up with his gun, and the boys had had no chance to get a weapon, even had they desired to do so, which they probably did not, as they were not of the fighting class.

"You'd better not touch us!" threatened Jerry.

"No! Hands off!" ordered Bob.

"Hear 'em talk!" mocked Bill. "Do ye think we kin handle 'em, Sam?"

"I reckon so. You take th' tall feller, an' I'll tackle th' other two. Th' old man looks harmless."

"I'll attend t' him," remarked the farmer. "I reckon Si Muggins ain't forgot how t' shoot."

The two hired men came rapidly forward. Sam laid a hand on the shoulder of Bob. The fat lad shrunk away, and looked to Jerry for a signal as to what to do. That youth, as Bill approached him, drew back his arm to deliver a blow. In another moment there would have been a fight, but the professor, looking up, and probably realizing for the first time what was going on, exclaimed:

"Easy, boys. We'll arbitrate this. Let them take you, and don't resist. The proper authorities will settle this."

"That's what they will!" declared Mr. Muggins, shaking his gun. "Tie 'em up, Bill an' Sam."

"There's no need for that," said Jerry more calmly. "We'll go wherever you want to take us."

"All right; then lock 'em in th' smoke house until I kin hitch up," decided the farmer, and, with feelings of bitter humiliation in their hearts, but resolving not to give in to the extortionate demands of Mr. Muggins, the four meekly followed the hired men.

A little later they were locked up, prisoners in the stifling smoke house, where, in the fall, hams

and bacon were cured over a hickory fire. It was dark, dirty and ill-smelling, and a great change from their comfortable airship, which they could just make out through the cracks in the smoke house door, resting near the damaged barn.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ESCAPE

"WELL, wouldn't this jar you!"

That was what Bob said.

"Say, it reminds me of when I was little, and used to get shut up in a dark closet for being bad."

That was Ned's contribution to the general conversation.

"I wish we'd yanked over his whole barn, and then gone on!"

This from Jerry, wrathfully.

"Well, it's too bad it's so gloomy in here that I can't even see to read my notes, or look for any specimens," lamented Professor Snodgrass.

Then they remained silent for a few minutes, going over in their minds their unpleasant situation. They sat on some saw horses which had been hastily thrust into their prison before the door had been locked.

"Seems to be a pretty solid sort of a place,"

observed Ned, after a pause, during which he had pounded and kicked on the sides of their shack.

"It is," agreed Jerry. "They don't use smoke houses much any more, and as they were built years ago, when the farmers had lots of time, they made 'em solid. But I wonder how long he's going to keep us here? The old villain! To have the nerve to ask us a thousand dollars for damages. Why, a hundred would more than pay him!"

"A hundred and fifty would, easily," declared Ned, "and I'd be willing to settle on that basis, for we ought to be at Danforth now."

They talked about their trouble for some time, and after an hour or two one of the hired men brought the prisoners some food. They ate heartily and a little later Mr. Muggins approached the smoke house.

"I can't take you fellers over t' court t'-day," he announced, "because one of my hosses is sick. But I'll take ye over fust thing in th' mornin', an' I'll have justice, too, unless ye want t' pay me th' thousand dollars now."

"In the first place, we haven't got it," declared Jerry, "and, if we did have, we'd never pay that amount."

"Then I'll hold ye fer th' proper authorities."

"Are you going to keep us in this place all night?" demanded the professor. "If you do you will be liable for severe penalties."

"I ain't aimin' t' keep ye here over night," went on Mr. Muggins. "I'm goin' t' put ye in th' harness room right away."

A little later the transfer was made, and, closely guarded, our friends were shifted to somewhat better quarters, though seemingly none the less secure. They were locked in a small room where hung many old, and some new harnesses, the apartment being partitioned off from the carriage house. The door was locked, and they were left alone, some blankets having been provided for beds, and the assurance given that they would soon have supper.

The day passed miserably and slowly. They could not see their airship from where they now were, and they feared lest something happen to it. Talk lagged among the boys, but the professor did not seem to mind his imprisonment, for he had light now to see to work on his notes, and he managed to capture several small bugs, which he put in his boxes that he had carried into his prison with him.

Supper was brought to them about dusk, and Jerry took the opportunity to demand of Mr.

Muggins that they either be taken at once before a magistrate, or released on payment of one hundred and fifty dollars, which, he said was all it would cost to repair the barn.

But Mr. Muggins was obstinate, and would not listen to reason. He departed, locking the harness room door securely after him.

"Well, we might as well make up our minds to spend the night here," said Bob gloomily. "Anyhow, I'm not hungry—at least for the present."

"That's a comfort," observed Jerry somewhat sarcastically. He was walking idly about the room when his foot happened to knock against a board near the floor.

Quickly he stooped over, and inserted his fingers in a crack. There was just light enough left from the fast-closing day, to show that the board was loose.

"Look, fellows!" exclaimed the tall lad.

"What is it?" asked Ned.

"This board! I believe we can kick it off and get out!"

"Do it then!" urged Bob.

"No, not now," said Jerry calmly. "It's too early, and they'd hear the noise. Wait until after dark, when they're all in bed, and we'll escape."

"But if we do get the board off," objected Ned,

"we'll only be out in the main room of the carriage house."

"That's all right," declared Jerry. "There are low windows there, and the doors don't fasten as tightly as this one does. We can get out of the carriage house easily enough, sneak to the airship, and be off before that rascally farmer and his hired men know what's up."

"Good!" cried Professor Snodgrass. "I'll help!"

They could hardly wait for the time to come. It got very dark, for the lantern had been taken away from them. At Jerry's suggestion they stretched out on the blankets and tried to rest until it should be late enough to make the attempt to escape.

They could hear movements about the barnyard, and guessed that remedies were being administered to the sick horse. At last, however, all was quiet, and, waiting to give the farmer's family time to get asleep, our heroes began to make ready to leave.

It was no easy matter to get the board off, but they finally managed it, and, after loosening another by the exercise of all their strength, they found they had a place big enough for them to squeeze through. Bob found it hard work, on

account of his stoutness, and Ned and Jerry, who got out first, had to pull their chum from in front, while Professor Snodgrass pushed from behind. But it was finally accomplished, though poor Chunky said he felt as though his skin was all scraped off him.

"Now to get out of this place!" exclaimed Jerry eagerly. "It ought to be easy!"

They located a window, by the starlight shining through it, and found that they could slide it back. Then, by standing on boxes, they managed to get out of it, and, a few minutes later they found themselves on the ground, in the shadow of the carriage house—free.

"Oh, but it's good to be out again!" exclaimed Ned, taking a long breath.

"No time for that now!" warned Jerry. "Hurry to the airship!"

They found the *Comet* where it had landed. It did not seem to have been touched, but it was fastened to the earth by ropes, attached to several stones as anchors.

"Get in!" ordered Jerry to his chums in a whisper. "I'll start the gas machine, and we'll rise like a balloon before starting the propellers. Then they won't hear us."

Rapidly they climbed aboard. Soon the hissing

of the gas generator told that vapor was being forced into the bag.

"Cast off!" ordered Jerry in a whisper, and the retaining ropes were loosened.

Up shot the *Comet* as if glad to be free once more. Higher and higher she rose, until she was above the roof of the barn.

Then, just as Jerry was about to turn the power into the motor and start the propellers, there was the sound of a window being thrown up, and a voice they recognized as that of Mr. Muggins's cried:

"Hold on there! Come back! Ye can't escape like that!"

There was a flash of fire, and a loud report. "He's shooting at us!" cried Bob.

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE BALLOON MEET

JERRY was working frantically at the machinery. Something seemed to be the matter with it, and he had a fear that perhaps the farmer or his men might have been tinkering with the motor.

"Why don't we move?" cried Ned.

"Yes, let's get out of here, or he'll have us back in that smoke house again!" yelled Bob.

"Can I help?" demanded the professor, who having placed his precious specimen boxes in a safe place aboard the ship, was scurrying about the deck in the darkness, without any special object in view.

"I'm doing the best I can!" cried Jerry. "This lever seems to be stuck!"

"Hold on there!" yelled the farmer again.
"I've got th' drop on ye! I'm goin' t' shoot ag'in!"

There was another flash of fire and a loud report. By the gleam from the gun the boys could see Mr. Muggins leaning out of his bedroom win-

dow, pointing the weapon at them. But they heard the bullet sing through the air, high over their heads.

"He isn't shooting at us!" cried Bob in a hoarse whisper. "He's aiming high!"

"He may put a hole through the gas bag! Hang it all. What's the matter with this lever, anyhow?"

As he spoke he gave it another sudden yank. There was a clicking sound, a hum and purr that became a muffled roar and then the motor started. The big propellers whirled around and the *Comet* shot ahead.

"Now we're safe!" cried Ned. "Shoot away, old man; you can't hit us now!"

As if taking the lad at his word Mr. Muggins fired again, but they did not hear the sound of the bullet. Then, faint and far away, for they were now some distance from the farmhouse, came the threatening voice:

"I'll catch you fellers yet! I know where ye're goin' in that there balloon machine, an' I'll be right arter ye! Ye can't git away from old man Muggins that way! I'll have the sheriff on yer trail!"

"Still, we did get away," exulted Jerry, "and

I'd like to see you catch us now, Mr. Muggins!" He turned more power into the motor and the craft shot ahead faster than ever, while, back in the darkness, an exceedingly angry farmer closed his window with a bang and muttered dire threats against the lads who had gotten the better of him.

Meanwhile our heroes were scudding along through the air. They did not venture to turn on any lights for some time, fearing that perhaps the ugly farmer, with a powerful rifle might manage to aim at them, and puncture the gas bag. But it did not take long to get out of range, and then they lit up.

"I know what I'm going to do," declared Bob, as he started for the store room.

"What's that, Chunky?" asked Ned.

"Get something to eat! That stuff Mrs. Muggins sent us was all right, but there wasn't enough of it. Don't you fellows want something? How about you, Professor?"

"Oh, you're the limit, Bob!" cried Jerry. "But I suppose there's no stopping you. Go ahead."

"We must be near Danforth," remarked Ned, a little later. "We don't want to run past it, Jerry, for we can't see it in the dark."

"No, and for that reason I'm going to slow down now, and remain as stationary as the wind will let us. There is no use going a long distance out of our way. I'll fill the gas bag, and we'll float in the air until morning."

This was soon done, and feeling very tired from the experience they had just passed through they all went to bed, leaving the *Comet* floating in space, blown here and there by gentle breezes which Jerry knew would not take them far out of their course.

"See anything of the grounds where the balloon meet is being held?" asked Jerry of Bob, who was up early to make coffee.

The stout lad took an observation over the rail of the craft before replying.

"Nothing like it in sight," he answered. "We seem to be over a farming country, and I can see two or three men driving their teams along the road. They're looking up here and waving their hands. That one fellow will dislocate his neck, if he doesn't look out."

"Well, see to it that the anchor isn't trailing," advised Jerry. "We can't afford to rip off any more barn roofs. By the way, I wonder if we hadn't ought to have left some money for Mr. Muggins?"

"He was too mean," declared Ned. "But we must be careful not to have any more delays. I'm

getting nervous about not seeing Mr. Jackson."

"We'll catch him to-day I guess," declared Jerry, as he got up to take an observation. By looking at some maps which he had, he calculated that they were within a few miles of Danforth, having been blown a little out of their course in the night. The motor was started, and the Comet headed in the right direction.

Eagerly the boys kept watch for the first sight of the big park where the balloon and aeroplane meet was to take place. They knew it would be visible some distance away, for there would be tents erected as "hangars" for the balloons, and probably the canvas shelters would be gay with flags.

They were right. Half an hour later Bob, who had gone away up forward, where he had an unobstructed view, gave a shout.

"There it is!" he cried. "I see it! Crimps! but it's a big one. We're all right, fellows, let's make a sensational landing, Jerry!"

"How do you mean?" asked the tall lad, "turn a somersault, or something like that?"

"No, but speed around, do some stunts and then come down in the middle of the park."

"All right, we'll try it."

And indeed Jerry was not a little proud of

what their craft could do, so he was willing to fall in with Bob's idea.

The Comet was sent up, and then directed downward. Then Jerry put her through some intricate evolutions, to show what control he had of her.

Though it was early there was a big crowd on the grounds and they were much interested in what was going on. The boys could see thousands of persons gazing up at them. They noted numbers of tents and sheds which evidently housed the big aircraft. There were several balloons without shelter, the big bags, partly filled, swaying in the wind.

One dirigible in particular attracted their attention. It was very large, and seemed to have a large boat-shaped cabin attached below it. In fact, the lower part was not unlike their own Comet.

About this craft there was quite a throng, and men could be seen busily engaged, evidently in getting it ready for a flight.

"Well, I guess we've done enough," remarked Jerry at length. "We'd better go down."

"Yes," agreed Ned. "I'd like to see what sort of a craft that one is," and he motioned to the big dirigible.

Hardly had he spoken than there came a shout from below, and the balloon rose swiftly in the air.

"They're making an early flight!" cried Bob. "We missed 'em."

"Oh, we can see from here just as well," said Jerry, as he checked the downward progress of the *Comet* for a moment.

Upward shot the big dirigible, amid the cheers of the onlookers, and then, wishing to make as good a landing as possible, and needing good speed and control to effect this, Jerry again sent the motor-ship downward.

A little later the motor boys landed in the midst of a big, green, open space, while the crowd thronged up around them, cheering their impromptu exhibition, and asking all sorts of questions.

"Here at last!" cried Ned, with a sigh of relief. "Now to find Mr. Jackson."

Overhead the big dirigible was shooting forward through space, for her propellers had been set in motion. The boys watched her with great interest, little knowing how their own fate was interwoven in that of the strange craft.

CHAPTER XX

MR. JACKSON IS GONE

"THAT's a great machine!"

"Sort of cross between a dirigible and an aeroplane."

"Wonder where they came from?"

"Say, how much speed can you make?"

"How high can you go?"

These were some of the comments and questions that greeted our friends as they alighted from their craft. They answered them as well as they could, and, having anchored the *Comet*, for there was some gas in the bag, that tended to raise her, they made their way through the press of people.

"Where shall we go?" asked Bob.

"To the office of the secretary, or some of the officials of the meet," answered Ned. "I want to inquire about Mr. Jackson. I hope I have those papers safe, that dad wants him to sign."

He quickly felt in his pockets, assured himself that the valuable documents were there, and kept on with his companions. Professor Snodgrass brought up in the rear, with his small butterfly net over his shoulder, and an empty specimen box in his hand, ready for whatever he might see in the way of insects.

Meanwhile Bob, Ned and Jerry were making their way to where they had been told were the offices of the company that had arranged the balloon meet. As the boys walked along they asked several men they met whether Mr. Jackson had arrived, but they could obtain no information. Either the persons were foreigners who had come to do stunts in their aeroplanes, and could not understand or speak much English, or else they had heard nothing of the man whom the merchant's son was so anxious to meet.

"Well, the secretary will be sure to know," decided Ned, as, followed by his chums, he entered the offices which were in a temporary building.

"Is Mr. Wescott Jackson's machine here yet?" asked Ned, when he had found the proper official.

"It was here," was the reply.

"Was here? Why, has he taken it away?"

"Not exactly. It's off on a trial trip."

"Then where is Mr. Jackson?"

"Oh, he's gone, too—he went in his dirigible balloon a little while ago. Didn't you notice a

craft going up, just as you came down?" asked the secretary.

"Yes—yes," replied Ned, while he felt a lump come up in his throat. "Was Mr. Jackson aboard?"

"Indeed he was. He is piloting his craft, and he has a friend with him besides the crew. As I said, he went off on a trial trip."

"When is he coming back?" asked Jerry.

"Well, it's hard to say."

"Do you mean he won't come back here at all?" demanded Ned, as he felt of the documents in his pocket—documents which it was so vital that Mr. Jackson sign.

"You see the meet officially opens to-day, and Mr. Jackson has promised to give an exhibition flight. Before venturing on that, however, he said he wanted to give his machine a tryout, so he took it up this morning. We expect him back almost any time."

"Oh, that's different," said Ned, with an air of relief. "I want to see him on very important business, but we can wait until he returns."

"I understand you have quite an airship yourself," went on the secretary. "Don't you want to enter her?"

The boys decided that they did not care to do this, at least until after they had seen Mr. Jackson, and obtained his signature.

"Perhaps we'll enter some of the contests then," remarked Jerry. "That is, if we may."

"Oh, we'd be glad to have you. In fact, if you will give an exhibition flight this morning the committee will pay you well for it. We expected to have a well-known aviator here with his biplane, but he has disappointed us, and we have nothing with which to interest the crowds until afternoon. So if you could fill in, we'd be much obliged to you."

"Let's do it," urged Bob eagerly.

"We might miss Mr. Jackson," spoke Ned.

"Oh, you needn't go far away from the grounds," put in the secretary, "and you can see Mr. Jackson's balloon when it heads back this way. I don't believe he'll go far off."

"Might as well then, to pass the time," suggested Jerry, and as Ned was willing, under these circumstances, the boys went back to their machine to get it ready for a flight. But Ned kept anxious eyes on the sky, watching for a first sight of the returning dirigible.

CHAPTER XXI

A MESSAGE FOR HELP

"What sort of stunts are you going to try, Jerry?" asked Ned, as the tall lad hurried here and there about the *Comet*, looking to see that all the machinery was properly adjusted.

"Oh, I don't know. We'll go up quite a distance—higher than any of the craft they have here, I guess, and we'll do some aerial evolutions. Then I thought we might show them how we can change from a dirigible to an aeroplane and back again, in mid-air, by letting the gas out of the bag, and filling it again."

"That's a good idea."

"Why don't you demonstrate the hydroplanes, too?" asked Bob, who, for some time now, had not mentioned eating.

"Where's the water?" inquired Jerry.

"I saw a little lake over in that direction as we were coming down," announced the stout lad,

pointing toward the left. "It looked big enough to land on, and even if you can't scoot across it, and rise from it, we can go up as a balloon."

"All right, we'll do it," agreed Jerry. "Better tell the secretary that if the crowd wants to see

that stunt they'll have to hustle over."

Bob took this information to the official, who came hurrying over from his office, greatly delighted at the prospect of having some attraction to take the part on the program that was to have been filled by the biplane. The secretary had announcements made through megaphones, concerning the prospective flight of the motor boys, and telling of the hydroplane feature.

Matters were soon in readiness, and, after a vain search for Professor Snodgrass, who, the boys thought likely, was off gathering bugs, it was decided to go up without him.

Up shot the Comet as Jerry turned on the gas. Straight up into the air she went, for it was as a dirigible balloon that the owners decided to show their craft's ability. Then, after doing some intricate figures at a comparatively low elevation, Jerry went out after a height record.

It is needless to say that he got it, for the barograph registered a little over three miles when they started to descend. They would not have had to come down then, only they ran into a cold snowstorm in the upper regions, and they did not want to take any chances.

When they landed, and the officials gave out the verified figures of their climb into space there was a hearty cheer. Jerry, with the aid of his chums, next showed what their craft could do as an aeroplane. She was sent skimming along the ground on the bicycle wheels, and, when enough momentum had been acquired, the steersman tilted the elevation rudder and up soared the Comet again.

This time the stunt of sailing along as an aeroplane, suddenly stopping the propellers, and changing to the form of a dirigible balloon was successfully accomplished, to the delight of the watching throng.

"Now for the hydroplanes!" Jerry announced to Bob and Ned, giving the signal agreed upon to those below. The press of people made a rush for the little lake about half a mile distant, and the boys waited until most of the crowd lined the shores before starting toward it.

Then, after sailing swiftly above the surface of the water Jerry suddenly began a descent. While Bob and Ned managed the craft Jerry stood ready at the hydroplane levers.

"Tell me when to shunt them into place," he called to Bob who was on the lookout.

"Now!" suddenly shouted the stout lad.

The lever snapped forward, the floats on the toggle-jointed arms went downward, while the bicycle wheels came up and, a moment later, the *Comet* was afloat.

A cheer went up from the crowd, and there was continued hearty applause for a feat that has seldom been seen, save very recently in airship circles.

Jerry put the craft slowly about on the lake, and then as it was drawing toward noon, when other aeroplane "stunts" would be the order of the day, and as they were anxious to see if they could sight Mr. Jackson returning, it was decided to go back to the aviation park.

Another cheer greeted the ability of our heroes, as they headed their craft for the park, and the crowd streamed back below them.

"See anything of the dirigible?" asked Jerry, as Ned was anxiously scanning the air all about them.

"No," was the somewhat despondent answer. "Mr. Jackson's machine doesn't appear to be in sight."

"Try with the glasses," suggested the tall lad,

passing to the merchant's son a pair of powerful binoculars. "Maybe you can pick him up with those."

Ned swept the horizon, and pointed the glasses to the zenith, taking in all the intervening space as well as he could. But the sight of a black speck, which could be focussed into a dirigible balloon, did not greet his eyes.

"Oh, well, he'll come back sooner or later," declared Jerry. "Perhaps he went farther than he intended to."

"Sure, he'll come back," added Bob. "We do seem to have the greatest luck missing that man. Everywhere we go we are just too late."

"The only thing that's worrying me is that he may have met with some accident, and—"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Jerry. "If there had been an accident we'd have heard of it. The grounds here are connected by telegraph with New York City and the whole country for that matter. In fact we're only a few miles from New York. We must try a trip across it before we go back to Cresville."

"That'll make the people in the skyscrapers look out of the windows and get stiff necks," predicted Bob with a laugh.

'As they landed and made fast their craft, in a sheltered space set aside for them by the secretary of the meet, the boys were aware of some excitement around a small building near the committee offices.

"What's going on over there I wonder?" asked Ned, as he saw a crowd running toward it, and surrounding a man in his shirt sleeves, who held a paper in his hand.

"We'll go over and see," suggested Jerry. "Maybe Professor Snodgrass has just discovered a pink flea on a yellow dog, or has picked some new kind of July bug from a lady's hat."

As they neared the place they saw by a sign on the temporary wooden building that it was a telegraph office, and also one where wireless messages could be received and sent.

"It's news from somewhere, evidently," commented Ned.

They pushed their way through the press of people.

"What is it?" cried several. "Read it to us!"
"I will, if you'll be quiet," answered the man
with the fluttering paper in his hand. "This is a
wireless message I just received from Mr. Wescott Jackson. It was sent from his dirigible balloon Manhattan."

"Read it!" cried the impatient throng.

"Here it is!" went on the man, and read as follows:

"We are disabled and are being blown out to sea in the grip of an upper-air hurricane! Send help, if possible!"

CHAPTER XXII

TO THE RESCUE

SILENCE greeted the reading of the message—silence at first, and then, as the import of the appeal came home to the crowd, there were murmurs of surprise and despair.

"Blown out to sea!" exclaimed Jerry. "How could they be over the ocean so soon after leaving here? They must have travelled at a terrific rate."

"You forget," said Bob, "that we're within a few miles of New York, and not far from the sea. It's only a short distance to the ocean."

"That's right," agreed Ned. "And if they're in a hurricane of the upper air they may be swept along for several days."

"But we must help them!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, who had temporarily abandoned his pursuit after specimens and had joined his friends in the crowd. "They have appealed to us all for aid." "That's right!" cried several. "We must go to the rescue. We must send out a relief expedition. Notify the naval authorities, and have a swift torpedo boat sent out to pick them up in case they fall into the sea. All ship captains should be notified by wireless."

"I'll attend to that part of it," promised the wireless operator who was stationed on the aviation grounds.

"But in which direction are they being blown?" asked Jerry. "Which way should the ships look for them? Did the message say?"

The operator shook his head.

"It just says that they are being blown out to sea," he replied.

"Quick!" cried Ned. "Get into communication with them again! Call them on the wireless and ask which way they are being blown."

"That's it!" shouted several in the crowd.

The operator made a jump for his instruments, and soon there was snapping through the air of the wireless waves, directed toward the runaway and disabled balloon.

There were several minutes of anxious waiting, while the crackling sounds could plainly be heard, so quiet was it. Suddenly Ned uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"Mr. Jackson!" replied the merchant's son. "Mr. Jackson is on that disabled balloon. He is being blown out to sea and he may never be rescued. Then my father's business will fail! Oh, what luck—what fearful luck we've had since we set out to find him! We can't seem to get in touch with him, and every day's delay makes it worse for poor dad!"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jerry, "that's so! I forgot for the moment that we need to see Mr. Jackson, and he's on that balloon, over the ocean. I guess——"

Jerry was interrupted by the reappearance of the wireless operator. There was a despondent look on the man's face.

"Did you hear from them?" cried Bob.

The man shook his head.

"It's of no use," he answered. "I called and called, and finally I did manage to pick them up; I started to ask them their direction, but their operator broke in on me."

"What did he say?" demanded Jerry.

"Just one word," was the answer, "just one word—'help!' That's all."

Once more came an ominous silence.

"Well, why don't we send help?" suddenly asked a man in the throng. "Here we are at a

balloon and aviation meet, and one of the aircraft needs help. There are several balloons on hand, and any number of aeroplanes. Why don't some of them start out to sea, and try to find Mr. Jackson and his crowd?"

"That's the stuff! Go to the rescue!" was the general cry.

It was a most practical suggestion, but when it came to the matter of applying it, trouble developed at once. Inquiries were made among the several balloonists and aviators as to which craft would be the best to send to aid the unfortunate men, who might, perhaps, even then, be in danger of death.

"Send the big balloon North America," said the man who had made the suggestion.

"I can't go in her," replied the pilot of the aircraft. "Mine isn't a dirigible, and I'm at the mercy of the wind when I get up. An aeroplane is what you need."

"There's the New Yorker!" came from several, and they started toward the shed where a large biplane, capable of carrying four passengers, was housed.

"No use," answered the owner of that craft. "I wouldn't dare go over the ocean in her."

"Why not?" asked Ned eagerly. For more

170 MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN reasons than one he wanted to see Mr. Jackson rescued.

"In the first place, my craft is not reliable enough," was the reply. "I might take a tumble into the sea myself. Then, again, I can't carry gasolene enough for a long flight, and, even if I did sight the *Manhattan* I couldn't do the people on her any good."

"Why not?" again demanded the man who had made the suggestion. "Didn't the steamer *Trent* rescue Wellman and his crew from the dirigible balloon *America* at sea?"

"They did," was the reply, "but the *Trent* could come to a stop. I can't come to a stop without falling into the sea. What is needed is a balloon or aeroplane that can remain stationary in the air."

As if by common consent the eyes of nearly every person in the crowd were turned toward the motor boys. Their craft which had been put through her paces that day, travelling on the water as well as through the air—which had come to a halt while nearly a mile high and had floated as easily as a feather—that craft—the Comet seemed to offer a solution of the problem. The boys felt it themselves, and perhaps only their

modesty had prevented them from offering their services before.

"Say!" cried the man who seemed to have taken charge of matters, "I guess it's up to you boys! Will you go to the rescue?"

He addressed himself to Jerry. The tall lad glanced at his companions. They nodded their heads in assent. As for Professor Snodgrass there was an eager look on his face.

"Go! Go!" he whispered to Jerry. "It's the very chance I need to get my singing fish."

Jerry hesitated but a moment longer.

"Very well," he answered, "we'll go."

"Good!" cried the man who had taken the initiative. Later the boys learned that he was Mr. Durkin, manager of the meet. "That's the way to talk, boys! Here we have a whole lot of aircraft, and only one really fit for practical work. Now, then, how about gasolene? Have you enough for a big trip? There's no telling how long you may be gone. Those upper-air hurricanes sometimes last for a week."

"We'll need to refill our gasolene tanks," said Jerry.

"Then we'll attend to that part for you," said Mr. Durkin. "There are hundreds of gallons of

the stuff here on the grounds. You look over your motor and machinery. It won't do to have it break down. How about provisions?"

"Enough for a month!" cried Bob, and when his chums laughed the crowd wondered why. But for once Bob had the advantage, and he knew it. Only for the stocking of the craft with a big supply of food would it be possible to go on a long trip. And had it not already been aboard there would have been a long delay.

"Well, fellows, if we're going, we'd better see to the *Comet*," proposed Jerry. "Come on, hustle! Professor Snodgrass—"

"I'll do anything you say. Oh, to think that at last we are to go to sea where I may get my singing fish! What shall I do?"

He was anxious to help, and for the time being forgot all about gathering ordinary specimens. Jerry mentioned several tasks which the little man could well attend to.

Soon there were busy scenes about the Comet. Gasolene was being poured into her reserve tanks. Bob took a last look at the provisions, and added several boxes and packages of food that kind friends offered. At Mr. Durkin's suggestion some medicines were taken along, also some

planks and ropes to be used in the possible rescue.

Jerry and Ned went over the machinery, and found that it was all right. Not a bolt was strained, not a nut loosened. The *Comet* was fit to make a flight half way across the Atlantic if need be.

"Well, I guess we're about ready to start," announced Jerry, after a last look over the machinery. There were many offers of help from persons in the crowd, but there was little they could do. Many also begged to be taken on the rescue trip, but these, of course, had to be refused.

"The sooner we get started the better," spoke Ned, as he started on a run across the aviation grounds.

"Where you going?" called Jerry.

"To send a message to dad. I want to tell him where we are going, and the reason why I haven't been able to get in touch with Mr. Jackson."

"That's a good idea. Send word to my folks, and to Bob's also."

"Sure!" called back Ned.

Soon a message was being flashed to his father, and to the other folks in Cresville. While waiting for a reply from his parent, Ned suggested to the operator that he try once again to get into communication with the *Manhattan*.

Through space the wireless messages clicked, but silence was the only answer.

"It's of no use," said the operator gloomily. "They may all be dead now."

Ned, too, felt the seriousness of the situation, but he was not going to give up so soon. Once more the instruments clicked.

"It's a message for you," spoke the operator. Ned read the dots and dashes, for he and his chums could both send and receive wireless and ordinary telegraphic messages.

"Go ahead," wired Mr. Slade to his son. "We all send our best wishes to you boys. Do your best to see Mr. Jackson, Ned. Vitally necessary to rescue him, for our own sakes. My business is in very poor shape. I am ruined unless Mr. Jackson lends me his aid and influence. Get to him if at all possible!"

"And I will, too!" declared the merchant's son with a grim tightening of his lips.

He hurried back to where the Comet waited but the movement of a lever to launch her into space and off to the rescue. Briefly Ned told his chums of the message.

"Are you all ready?" asked Mr. Durkin.

"All ready," replied Jerry. "Get aboard, Professor, we are going to start."

Everything had been done that human foresight could think of to make the rescue a success. Jerry took his position in the steering tower.

Slowly he pulled the starting lever toward him. In another instant the *Comet* would dart forward. But, before the tall lad could pull the handle, a man pushed his way through the crowd, laid his hand on the rail of the aircraft and exclaimed:

"I forbid this balloon to leave the grounds!" "Why?" demanded Jerry, leaning out of the window of the pilot house.

"Because I've got an attachment against it for a thousand dollars, and it can't go until that amount is paid to Mr. Silas Muggins for damage you did to his barn. You and your machine are in the grip of the law!"

CHAPTER XXIII

OVER THE OCEAN

For a few moments after this unexpected announcement neither of the motor boys knew what to say. Nor did Professor Snodgrass seem able to utter anything in keeping with the seriousness of the occasion. As for Mr. Durkin, and the officers of the meet, who were anxious for our heroes to start on the rescue expedition, they gazed blankly at the sheriff's officer, whom they correctly guessed the man to be.

"Do you mean that we can't leave in our own motor-ship?" demanded Jerry, stepping out on deck.

"That's exactly what I mean," was the reply. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Morton, and I've got an attachment on this airship, or whatever you call it. I'm in possession now, and I forbid you to leave this place with the ship," saying which Mr. Morton jumped aboard.

"I guess you fellers will sing a different tune

now!" exclaimed another voice, and pushing through the crowd came Mr. Muggins himself, a grim smile on his wrinkled features. "You thought you'd git ahead of me, sneakin' off in th' night, but I allowed as how you'd point fer this balloon fair. So I jest hitched up, went t' th' sheriff an' swore out an attachment ag'in ye, an' here I be. Ye don't stir till ye pay my thousand dollars."

"But we don't owe you a thousand dollars!" exclaimed Ned, to whom every moment of delay seemed an hour, so anxious was he to do something to save his father's business.

"Ye damaged my barn that amount, an' ye've got t' pay it; ain't they, Mr. Morton?"

"That's what th' law says. I'm in possession," and the sheriff's deputy coolly took a seat in the cabin of the motor-ship, and looked through the opened windows at the crowd. There had been murmurs of indignation when Mr. Morton prevented the ship from leaving, but at this explanation several inquiries were made as to how the affair had originated.

Jerry briefly explained the accident, stating that the barn was only slightly damaged, and he told of the shabby treatment accorded him and his chums by Mr. Muggins.

"But you don't seem to understand the seriousness of this, my dear man," said Mr. Durkin to the farmer. "Are you aware that you may be the cause of a number of persons losing their lives in the balloon *Manhattan*, unless these lads are allowed to go to the rescue? Do you realize that?"

"I don't realize nothin', but that I want a thousand dollars," asserted Mr. Muggins.

"No, I guess money is all you ever do realize," murmured Bob.

"I appeal to you," pleaded Mr. Durkin, to the sheriff's deputy. "Can't you let this airship go? You will be responsible for the deaths of several people if you prevent the rescue."

"No use appealing to me," declared Mr. Morton. "I ain't responsible for anything but my duty. I have to do as the law says, and as I've sworn to do. Pay the thousand dollars, and I'll take off the legal attachment, and the craft can go. But I ain't allowed to do otherwise."

Clearly he was within his rights.

"If Mr. Muggins will release his claim temporarily, I won't say a word," went on Mr. Morton. "It's up to him. I can vacate the attachment if he says so."

"Well, I don't say so!" cried the disagreeable man. "I know my rights an' I'm goin' t' have

'em! I want a thousand dollars fer damages t' my barn!"

There seemed to be no way of getting around it, and it looked as if the *Comet* would have to stay there, for the boys did not have a thousand dollars, and it would take some time to procure it from home, even if they were disposed to allow themselves to be swindled in that fashion.

"Can't we make a sudden dash, and get away?" whispered Ned to Jerry. "We could take the sheriff's man with us if we had to."

Jerry shook his head.

"It would be too risky," the tall lad decided. "He might draw a gun, and fire at the gas bag, or something. Besides it would mean an extra person on board, and if we rescue Mr. Jackson and his friend and crew, we're going to be pretty well crowded as it is. I dare not chance it."

Gloom settled on Ned's face. Bob did not know what to do. Jerry was at a loss. Professor Snodgrass seemingly had put all thoughts of trouble out of his mind, and was poring over his note-books. Suddenly, however, the little scientist looked up, and, addressing Mr. Morton, asked:

"Couldn't we give a bond of indemnity for double the amount of the damages—say for two

thousand dollars? If we did that, guaranteeing the payment to Mr. Muggins of his claim when it was properly proved, couldn't we be allowed to go?"

"Yes, that might be done," admitted the deputy. "I am authorized to accept a good bond. But who would give it?"

"I would," said Mr. Snodgrass eagerly. Hope showed on the faces of the motor boys. But the sheriff's man shook his head.

"I don't know you. You're a stranger to me," he declared. "I don't know whether you're good for the bond or not."

"But I tell you that I am, and these boys know it," said the scientist innocently.

"That won't do," declared the officer.

"How about my bond?" suddenly asked Mr. Durkin. "You know me. I'll sign the bond for two thousand dollars so these boys can go to the rescue. Will you take it?"

"Yes, I'll take your bond," agreed the officer.

"Then come over to the office, and I'll sign it!" went on Mr. Durkin eagerly. "There's no time to lose. Get started, boys!"

The deputy came slowly down from the airship. Mr. Muggins looked puzzled and disappointed. He did not understand the matter of the bond. He wanted the cash.

"Now's your time, Jerry!" exclaimed Ned suddenly, as he saw the officer alight on the ground. "Start her up!"

"Sure! Everything is clear!" added Bob eagerly.

Jerry nodded comprehendingly. With a last look to see that everything was in order he yanked the starting lever toward him. The Comet shot forward across the smooth ground on her bicycle wheels, for the boys were going to send her aloft as an aeroplane, saving their lifting gas for emergencies. Faster and faster the craft moved, the crowd parting to make way for her. Mr. Muggins saw his prize getting away from him.

"Here!" he cried. "Here! Come back! I want my thousand dollars!"

After the *Comet* he ran, his coat tails flying in the wind, while, over and over again, he cried:

"Come back! Come back! I want my money! The money for my barn. Hi! Mr. Sheriff, them fellers is escapin'!"

"Faster Jerry!" cried Ned. "He may catch us, and hang on!"

"Not much!" remarked the tall lad grimly.

He put on more speed. Then, seeing that they were going fast enough to rise in the air, he pulled the elevating rudder lever.

Up shot the *Comet*, while the crowd cheered. Up and up she went, leaving a much chagrined farmer running breathlessly and uselessly after it, meanwhile shaking his fists at our heroes in the air.

"Off at last!" murmured Ned with a sigh of relief. "Off to the rescue!"

"Yes, and I hope we'll be in time to save them," added Jerry somewhat solemnly.

"I hope we get the singing fish," spoke the professor. "That is," he went on quickly, "after we save those poor people in the balloon!"

Higher and higher into the air went the Comet. The tents and buildings in the aviation park looked like tiny structures now. Soon the grounds had disappeared from sight. The great city of New York and her surrounding boroughs loomed up in the distance.

In a little while they were over the great city, but so high up that the boys could not see the wondering crowds which they knew must be watching their progress.

"Over the Hudson," remarked Bob, as they flew high above that historic river. Then they

proceeded down toward the Battery, out over the Narrows, faster and ever faster, past the forts at the entrance to the harbor, out beyond Coney Island, leaving Atlantic Highlands on their right, out past Sandy Hook, on and on, the water widening more and more until finally Jerry announced.

"Over the ocean at last! Now, fellows, we've got to keep up our spunk and courage, and depend on ourselves. This is the riskiest trip we've ever undertaken. All hands keep a sharp watch out for the runaway balloon!"

Onward they sped, and they little knew what was before them.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE HURRICANE

"Well, now we're well started, I think I'll go and—"

"See about dinner, or supper or breakfast, or something like that; eh, Chunky?" interrupted Ned with a laugh.

"Hu? How'd you know?" asked the stout lad.

"Oh, I could tell by the expression of your face," remarked the merchant's son. "Whenever you begin that way you can generally be depended on, Bob, to say something about eating."

"Aren't you hungry, Jerry?" and the stout lad

appealed for vindication to his tall chum.

"Yes, I am," he admitted. "Go ahead, Bob, and get something ready while Ned and I take a look around the machinery and see if it's working all right."

"I'll wager Ned's hungry, too, only he won't admit it," murmured the fat lad as he started toward the galley.

They had been making good progress and it

had been some time since they had eaten, for the alarming message about the unmanageable dirigible balloon, and the excitement that followed, had driven all thoughts of meals from their minds. Now, however, in spite of Ned's joking, everyone was glad Bob had mentioned eating.

The Comet was sailing along over the ocean, not making any great speed, for Jerry and his chums had not yet decided what course to follow. It was rather like searching in the dark, for they did not know in which direction to look for the Manhattan. They could only cruise about, trusting to chance to put them on the right path.

Jerry and Ned found that the machinery was working well, and the tall lad, on his return to the pilot house, ventured to speed up the motor slightly. Meanwhile Bob was busy with the meal, which would be a cross between a late dinner and an early supper.

Professor Snodgrass had laid aside his notebooks, and had put away his specimen boxes. Now, with a small but powerful telescope he was seated on the forward deck of the motor-ship, eagerly scanning the ocean below him for a sight of the flying singing fish.

"Do you expect to find it so near land, Professor?" asked Ned.

"No, hardly, yet I must not let a chance escape me. Even if I don't get the fish I want right away, I may see some other specimen I need. You can descend whenever you want to, can't you?"

"I suppose so, but you'd better talk to Jerry about that part of it."

The professor lost no time in interviewing the tall lad, for he wanted to be ready to have the Comet drop to the surface of the ocean at a moment's notice, in case he saw a specimen he desired to catch.

"Yes, we can go down almost any time except when it's too rough," said Jerry. "In fact, I was thinking of going down shortly to see how the hydroplanes worked on salt water. They ought to do better than in fresh, as salt water is more buoyant. We'll go down as soon as we have something to eat."

Perhaps the professor can be excused for hurrying through with his meal, as he was anxious to get down to the surface of the sea. Jerry, too, wondered how his new attachment would work when there was a swell on, for, up to now, he had only tested the hydroplanes on comparatively smooth water.

"Well, here we go," he announced, when, after

getting up from the table, they had all gathered in the pilot house ready for the descent. "Ned, you take charge of the air rudder, will you? And Bob, you stand here ready to throw in the gears of the water propeller when I give the word. I'm going to stand by the hydroplane lever."

"Is there anything I can do?" asked the pro-

fessor eagerly. "I'd like to help."

"Oh, I guess we can manage," replied Jerry. "Pull the depressing handle, Ned."

The merchant's son yanked the lever toward him. Almost instantly the *Comet* pointed her nose toward the ocean that rolled below them. The boys were now practically out of sight of land.

Professor Snodgrass, seeing that he could be of no service, again took up his telescope to scan the water for a possible sight of some fish specimen, though he did not hope to so soon get the prize he sought.

"We're almost down," murmured Ned, who was keeping watch through a glass window in the floor of the pilot house.

"Yes," agreed Jerry. "Now, Ned, stand ready to haul up on the bicycle wheels when I give the word."

The three boys were on the alert. Would the

new attachment work on the ocean? They were all anxious to know.

"Now, Bob and Ned!" called Jerry suddenly. Ned hauled up the bicycle wheels, which were on jointed arms. Bob threw the gears of the water propeller into mesh, while Jerry lowered the toggle-jointed arms to which were attached the hydroplanes.

Down upon the surface of the ocean settled the Comet, and then, as Jerry started the motor which revolved the water propeller, the craft darted forward with an easy motion like some graceful yacht.

"How about it?" asked Bob eagerly.

"Couldn't be better," declared Jerry. "The hydroplanes work as well on the ocean as they did on the lake. Boys, it's a great success. Now if we find Mr. Jackson and his friends we can rescue them in the air or on the water!"

They moved along for a mile or more upon the surface of the sea. Of course their progress was not as smooth as in the air, for there was a rolling, heaving motion to the ocean waves. But as our heroes were used to travel in a big motor-boat, they did not mind the swell.

Professor Snodgrass did not see his singing

fish, nor did he have great hopes that he would. He used a small net which was sunk to some little depth by means of weights, but he did not get any valuable specimens. Only one small fish rewarded his efforts.

"I don't care for it myself," he said, "but I have a friend who will like it for his collection," and he put it into a jar of water to save it.

As the afternoon was waning Jerry decided to ascend into the air again, and so, starting the larger propellers, in order to get more speed, they mounted upward, and once more were on their way, searching for the disabled balloon.

But the welcome sight of the *Manhattan* did not greet them, and darkness was fast coming on. The great searchlight was kindled and with the glowing beam shooting ahead of them they continued on through space.

All night they travelled, one or the other of the boys being on the watch all the while, searching the heavens for a glimpse of a moving light that would indicate the presence of the craft they sought. But morning came with no success.

"Do you know what I think we ought to do," spoke Bob, after breakfast.

"What; eat again?" asked Ned, with a wink at Jerry.

"No. Now cut out that joking, can't you? I think we ought to go higher up, say a couple of miles. The air will be clearer, and we can see farther."

"Good idea, Chunky!" declared Jerry. "We'll do it. Maybe we can see the balloon, then."

The motor was speeded up, and in a short time, with her elevating rudders tilted skyward, the Comet was climbing higher into the air. When the barograph measured fourteen thousand feet height Jerry sent the craft along at that level, while all on board peered eagerly about for the Manhattan.

They had been travelling on this way for perhaps two hours, and Jerry was wondering how far they might venture out over the ocean, when Ned asked:

"Why are you speeding up the motor? Aren't we going fast enough?"

"I haven't put on any more speed," was the reply.

"Look at the tractometer," was Ned's reply, and glancing at the instrument Jerry saw, with a start, that they were going about seventy-five miles an hour. "That's odd," he remarked, "the motor is only set for about forty."

"What can be the matter?" asked Bob.

Even as he spoke they noticed that the needle of the dial on the tractometer slowly swung around until it pointed to ninety miles. At the same time they were aware that there was a curious humming sound in the air outside.

"We must have struck a swiftly-moving current of air," spoke Jerry.

Once more they looked at the tractometer. It now registered a hundred miles an hour, and the sound outside increased to a roar.

Suddenly the *Comet* gave a sickening dive, and almost turned turtle. Only the new fin-keels Jerry had put on, and the automatic equilibrium machine, saved them from being turned over.

"What's the matter?" cried Professor Snodgrass, coming into the steering tower.

"It must be an upper-air hurricane!" gasped Jerry. "The same kind that caught the Manhattan! We're in its power!"

The wind was now howling and roaring outside the motor-ship, which plunged and careened in the air like a ship in a storm on the ocean. Faster and faster she scudded along in the gale,

192 MOTOR BOYS OVER THE OCEAN more rapidly than her motors could take her, even at top speed.

"We must go down!" gasped Jerry hoarsely. "Go down, or we may be ripped all apart!" And he sprang to the lever of the depressing rudder.

CHAPTER XXV

A CLEW

For a few moments it seemed to the Motor Boys that the end of everything had come. It appeared impossible that their comparatively frail craft could weather the storm in the very heart of which she was being hurled along. Now tilted with her bow toward the earth; again, almost standing on her tail rudders; now on her port beam, and again on the starboard—the gallant Comet struggled on in the grip of the hurricane.

"Lend a hand, fellows!" gasped Jerry, as he tried in vain to bring the lever of the depressing rudder toward him. "Lend a hand! The wind pressure is so strong that I can't work this alone."

Bob and Ned sprang to their chum's aid, and even then the task was almost more than that to which their combined strength was equal. Professor Snodgrass, seeing their trouble, was about to give them some assistance, when an instant's lull in the gale so relieved the pressure on the

planes that they were able to bring the lever to the right position.

"Jove, but it blows!" cried Ned. "It's a wonder it didn't rip off the wings, rudders and everything else."

"Lucky thing for us they're of double strength," added Bob, for with the remodeling of the motorship, the wing-planes and rudders had been strengthened.

"I guess we'll be all right, now," observed Jerry. "We must have gotten into the hurricane by coming up so high. I'll stay at a lower level after this."

"Do you suppose it's the same gale that Mr. Jackson and the others were caught in?" asked Ned.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," was the reply of the tall lad. "And if they're in it, and it's still blowing at this rate, they'll be carried half-way across the Atlantic before we can catch them."

"My gracious!" exclaimed Professor Snodgrass, "half-way across the Atlantic! That will be just the thing for me. I can get my singing fish then."

"I hope we don't have to go that far to rescue them," spoke Jerry. "But if we don't soon get out of this wind we may not get anywhere." "We don't seem to be going down out of it very fast," observed Ned, with a glance at the barograph. It still registered nearly two miles above sea level.

"That's so," agreed Jerry with a look at the instrument. "I wonder if anything could have happened to the depressing rudder. Maybe it doesn't work, or it may be disconnected from the lever. In that case—"

"I'll go outside and look," volunteered Ned, clinging to the side wall of the pilot house in which they all were.

"No, I'll go," decided Jerry. "It's risky, and—"

"You want to take all the risk," interrupted Bob. "Let me go. I'm shorter than you, and the wind won't have so much surface to blow on. I'll go."

It did seem wise to let the smaller lad venture outside on the stern deck, and inspect the rudder, and after some argument Jerry consented to this. By going out of the rear door of the main cabin, Bob would, in a measure, be sheltered by the deck structures.

The force of the gale may be imagined when it is said that as Bob stepped out he felt himself fairly forced down toward the deck, as if some

giant hand had pushed him. The power of the wind was terrific, and, realizing this, the stout lad got down as low as possible, and fairly crawled on his hands and knees to a place where he could see the rudder.

"It's there, all right," he reported pantingly to his chums, when he had worked his way back to the cabin.

"Then why don't we go down?" asked Ned. "Is it set to send us down, Chunky?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't see-"

"I believe it's because the wind is so powerful that we can't cut our way downward through the level strata of the hurricane," was Jerry's opinion.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Bob.

"It's this way, and I think Jerry is right," spoke Mr. Snodgrass. "We're sailing along on an almost solidified bank of air, which is compressed by great pressure. To go below, into an area where there is no storm, it is like cutting through a layer of thick ice to get to the water beneath. But the air buoys us up so that we're having difficulties."

"What are we going to do?" inquired Ned anxiously.

"We've got to do something, that's evident," responded the tall lad, as a sudden burst of the storm once more nearly made the *Comet* turn turtle. "We've got to get out of this."

Jerry went to the engine-room, and called to Bob and Ned to accompany him. He began adjusting the machinery.

"What are you going to do?" asked Ned.

"Key up the motor," explained the tall lad. "We've got to try and beat this wind, and the only way we can do it is to get up all the speed possible, and cut down through the air. Bob, hand me that monkey-wrench. Ned, you tighten up the intake valves, and open the outlets on the port cylinders. I'll set the electric generator to give a hotter spark and one at shorter intervals. We've got to go down!"

The need was increasing every moment, for the hurricane, instead of dying out, was getting worse every second.

Soon the motor was working at twice its former speed. The great propellers could be observed whirling around with terrific power. Now, if ever, the *Comet* should go down. Anxiously they watched the needle of the barograph. It remained stationary for a few minutes, during which the craft trembled from end to end with

the awful strain. Then the pointer swung slowly around.

"There she goes!" cried Ned in delight.

"Yes, we're going down," observed Jerry, with a sigh of relief.

"And none too soon," added Bob, as another gust sent the motorship on end.

It was a struggle between the forces of nature and those of man, and the machinery won. Slowly the airship was forced down on a slant until, finally piercing through the strata that represented the terrific wind, she came to a calm region about two thousand feet above the sea. Then, bringing her to a level keel, Jerry sent the craft onward.

"And not a sign of the Manhattan," remarked Ned, a little later, when the motor had been slowed down to its usual speed.

"No," spoke Jerry, "but the search isn't over yet. I'm sure we're going in the right direction, though. The hurricane did us that much service, for it's evident that the missing balloon was caught just as we were, only they haven't powerful enough machinery to get out of it. Now we'll keep on at this level, and in this direction."

Nothing developed the rest of that day. They flew onward slowly, taking turns scanning the air

about them through a powerful telescope for a sight of the dirigible containing the man whose aid was so greatly needed by Mr. Slade. But the *Manhattan* was not seen.

At night they set the powerful searchlight aglow, hoping that it might be observed by those whom they sought, and who possibly could send out a signal, indicating their position. But no signal came. Thus two more days passed, and the Comet at times was sent about, back over the air-line over which they had come, for Jerry feared they might have passed the missing balloon in the night.

Several times they dropped to the surface of the ocean, to give Professor Snodgrass a chance to use his net in an endeavor to get the singing fish. But his efforts were unsuccessful.

"It seems as if there was a hoodoo on this trip," spoke Ned gloomily, one morning as they were sailing along. "We missed Mr. Jackson at every point, and now no one knows where he is."

"Oh, we'll find him yet," said Jerry cheerfully. "I tell you what let's do: go down on the hydroplanes and fish! Some fresh fish would go good for dinner; eh, Chunky?"

"Sure. I'll fry 'em brown in corn-meal. Send her down, Jerry."

The Comet was once more dropped to the surface of the sea, and the boys got out their lines. They had pretty good luck, and a fish dinner was a certainty. Of course, the professor only tried for his prize, but he did not get it.

Bob was just landing a large fish, and was giving all his energy to it, when the attention of Ned and Jerry was attracted to a large steamer, which was rapidly approaching them. They had not noticed her creeping up on the horizon.

"She seems to be heading this way," observed Ned.

"Yes; maybe she wants to see what sort of a craft we are, fellows," said Jerry.

Suddenly there came a puff of smoke, a dull flash, and a booming sound came over the water.

"They're firing at us!" cried Bob, who had landed his fish.

"No; I think it's a signal," remarked Jerry, who had observed closely, and had not seen a projectile bounding over the wave crests. "They may take us for a wreck, and want us to know that we're going to be saved."

This, as they learned later, was the reason for the shot. On came the steamer, and soon it was within hailing distance. The rails were lined with curious passengers, many of whom were taking snap-shots of the Comet, as she rested lightly on the water. On the steamer's bridge were the captain and a number of officers.

"What sort of a craft are you, and what are you doing?" came the hail through a megaphone.

"The Comet, of Cresville," returned Jerry.

"Where are you bound?"

"We don't know. We're looking for a disabled balloon."

"Do you need any help?"

It was evident that Jerry's answers were not well understood since before he could reply to the question about aid, a small boat was lowered, and came rapidly toward the *Comet*.

"Do you want to be taken off?" asked the mate in charge.

"No; we're all right," was Jerry's reply. "We're going on through the air soon. We just came down here to catch some fish. But have you seen anything of the balloon Manhattan, which ought to be somewhere out to sea?"

The mate had not, nor had the sailors, and it was evident that they hardly knew what to believe about the *Comet*. Seeing their incredulity, Jerry started the air-propellers, and, getting a flying start, mounted up into the sky, circling over and around the steamer.

There were cries of wonder at this, and a round of applause from the passengers and crew. Then the boys dropped back to the ocean again on the hydroplanes, and, in response to a request from the captain, Jerry and Bob went aboard the Cinnabar, leaving Ned and Mr. Snodgrass on the Comet.

Jerry explained to an admiring and wondering throng the object of their voyage through the air.

"But we can't get a sight of the Manhattan," he concluded, "and we want to very much, for we wish to rescue the people aboard her, and it is very necessary for us to get Mr. Jackson's signature to certain papers."

"Well, that's the greatest stunt I ever heard of," declared the captain. "Using one airship to go to the rescue of another. But can't you pick her up by wireless?"

"We've tried, but none of our signals are answered," replied Bob.

"Their apparatus may be disabled," said Jerry. "Well, if you haven't sighted her, we'll have to keep on hunting."

"Wait a minute," suggested the commander. "I'll have an inquiry made among the crew and passengers. None of my officers have reported seeing anything like a runaway balloon, but it's

just possible that some one else may have sighted it, and said nothing about it."

A steward was sent to make a general inquiry, and, while waiting, Jerry explained the nature of the *Comet*, and how she worked.

"Well?" asked the captain, as the steward returned, "did you learn anything?"

"Yes, sir," was the unexpected answer; "last night, when Lars Porsen had the bow lookout, he said he saw, about midnight, several lights, close together in the sky, quite a distance up. They were moving rapidly, and, all at once, they seemed to come down toward the sea. He thought they were shooting stars, until he heard voices crying. Then he got frightened, being of a superstitious nature, sir, and he decided not to report it. But he thinks now, that it may have been the missing airship being blown along, sir."

"That's her, without a doubt!" cried Jerry excitedly. "In what direction was she?"

"A little to the north-east of here," replied the steward, "and she was making rather a northerly course, according to Porsen."

"Then we've been on the wrong track!" cried the tall lad. "We'll change our direction! Come on, Bob! I believe we have a clew at last!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WRECK

Despite the invitation of the captain to remain longer aboard the Cinnabar, Jerry and Bob insisted on going back at once to the floating Comet. Lars Porsen was sent for and questioned, but he could add little to what he had told the steward. There seemed no doubt but that he had sighted the missing Manhattan.

"This will be good news for Ned," remarked Jerry, as he and his chum were being rowed back to their air-craft, and indeed the merchant's son was delighted with it. He had begun to give up hope, and when he thought of his father waiting for the aid of Mr. Jackson, fighting off his relentless business enemies, the heart of Ned was sad. Now he brightened up.

"We'll get right on the trail!" he cried. "Come on, Jerry, speed the *Comet* up as fast as she'll go."

"Yes, for if any one is left alive on the balloon,

they must need help by this time," observed the tall lad. "They may have given up hope of ever being rescued."

"I hope they have plenty to eat," remarked Bob, with a tragic air, as he thought of the well-filled larders of the *Comet*.

"Oh, you cannibal!" cried Ned, as he hastened here and there, helping Jerry get ready to send the motorship on her way again.

The passengers and crew of the Cinnabar cheered as the gallant little craft left the waves and flew into the air. Then, circling about, and dipping the airship down in place of lowering any colors, in response to three hoarse blasts from the steamer's whistle, Jerry sent the Comet off in the direction indicated by the sailor.

Soon the smoke of the big vessel was left far astern, and once more our friends were peering eagerly forward through the telescope for a sight of the disabled balloon.

Bob prepared the fish they had caught in so many different ways, and so often, that Ned and Jerry declared they never wanted to see a hook or line again. But they also had good meals of other viands, for Bob gave his whole attention to the task of cooking. Indeed, for the next few days there was little else to do. They kept on,

moving slowly, so as not to miss the big balloon, and travelling a few miles on either side of the direct course, pursuing a sort of zig-zag way, in order to cover more space.

Professor Snodgrass had his note-books all written up—he had classified and arranged all his specimens, and then he sighed for new ones. But none was to be had, for they were now well out to sea, beyond the limits of birds or insects, and the water below them offered the only dwelling-place of specimens. As they did not want to lose time, they did not go down again for some time.

One evening, after an uneventful day, when their eyes ached with the strain of looking in vain for the balloon, the three boys were sitting on the forward deck, talking over matters connected with their trip. The automatic steering apparatus had been set, and there was no need of any one being in the pilot house.

Suddenly Jerry, who had been listening to some banter between Bob and Ned, jumped to his feet, exclaiming:

"I smell smoke! There must be something afire!"

"So do I!" added Ned.

It was enough to cause intense alarm to all of

them, for a fire on board the airship, with the tanks filled with the lifting gas, was a terror most to be dreaded.

Fairly running, Jerry made his way back to the stern, followed by his two chums. The smell of smoke became stronger as they neared the afterdeck, and, once they were beyond the deck superstructures, they caught fleeting glimpses of darting tongues of fire.

"Quick! Bring the extinguishers! They're in the main cabin!" cried Jerry. Bob and Ned started back after them, while the tall lad kept on, to discover the location of the fire, which seemed to be in the very stern of the craft.

Jerry saw some dark object, from which the smoke seemed to be coming, and in the interior of which were seen the flames. He was about to rush at it, and toss it overboard, thinking fire might have been started by spontaneous combustion in some box or crate, when Bob and Ned ran up with chemical extinguishers.

"There it is!" cried Jerry, pointing to the fire. "Play the hose there!"

Suddenly there was a yell, and from the midst of the dark object, which the boys could now see was a canvas shelter, like a small tent, there sprang Professor Snodgrass, all dripping from the chemicals.

"Here! What's the matter?" he shouted. "Stop! You're drowning me!"

"We're trying to put out the fire!" yelled Jerry. "What were you doing there? Are you burned? Did the smoke make you unconscious?"

"Fire! There's no fire!" cried the little scientist, as he wiped the trickling chemicals from his face.

"No fire! Why the smoke?" asked Ned.

"And the flames!" added Bob.

"And the smell!" came from Jerry.

"It was no fire," went on the scientist, as he kicked over the canvas shelter. "I had just made a little smudge on a piece of sheet iron. I was smoking one of the fish I had caught, to preserve the specimen. I built a fire out here on deck, where there would be no danger, and put certain chemicals on it to preserve the fish skin. That's what made the smell."

"It certainly *smelled*, all right," grimly remarked Jerry. "Are you sure there's no fire on the deck boards, professor?"

"Not a bit. Oh, I took good care there would be no danger. I put a pan of water on deck, and on top of that I laid some sheet-iron. Then I made a little fire of wood and old rags on the iron, sprinkled the chemicals in the flames, and held the fish over them. I'm sorry if I caused you any fright."

"Well you did—a little," admitted Jerry, "but I guess——"

"I more than paid for it," interrupted the scientist with a smile. "However, it's all done. I just got through as you squirted the chemicals on me."

As he had said, he had taken precautions against the little blaze spreading, and now the charred wood and rags on the sheet of iron were dropped into the ocean.

"You never can tell what he's going to do next," complained Jerry to his chums, with a smile, as they went into the cabin.

All the next day they watched. Several times they mistook low-lying clouds, or a dark bit of mist for the balloon they sought, but, on increasing their speed, and hastening toward it, they saw their error.

It was toward the close of the afternoon when Bob, who was on the lookout in the bow, cried:

"Hi, fellows, here's something!"

Jerry and Ned hastened forward. There,

floating on the ocean, which was about a thousand feet below them, was a dark mass, slowly rising and falling on the swell.

"The balloon! Wrecked!" cried Ned. "We're too late!"

"It certainly is some sort of a wreck," agreed Jerry, as he adjusted the telescope. He took a long look through the glass. Then he shook his head.

"I can't make it out on account of the haze," he said. "We'll go down to it. Speed up the motor, Ned."

CHAPTER XXVII

ATTACKED BY A WHALE

RAPIDLY the motorship shot downward to the surface of the sea, landing on her hydroplanes. She was about half a mile from the dark object that floated on the water, a confused mass of twisted iron, splintered wood and flapping canvas. Jerry had not dared drop any closer to it, lest a sudden gust of wind might carry the *Comet* against the sharp points and damage her.

"What do you make it out to be?" asked Ned, as they neared the wreck, the Comet being sent ahead by her water propeller.

"It isn't the balloon, that's sure," declared Jerry. "That is, unless it's all twisted together."

"No; I don't believe it's the Manhattan," agreed Bob.

Ned certainly hoped that it was not, for that would mean the end of his efforts to find Mr. Jackson alive. As they drew nearer to the floating mass, they saw that it was the part of some sailing

craft, which had come to grief through stress of wind and wave.

"A derelict," remarked Professor Snodgrass, as the Comet came to a stop not far from it. "A floating derelict, and a great menace to navigation. If some steamer were to hit that in a fog, or on a dark night, it might send her to the bottom. I wish we could go aboard."

"Why?" asked Ned.

"Because I might get some specimens on her. Perhaps some of the crew, before they abandoned her, might have had some strange birds, animals or insects from the tropics, and if they were left behind, as they probably were, they would prove to be a valuable addition to my collection."

"I'm afraid we can't go on her unless we swim," said Jerry. "We have a small boat aboard, but the sea is a little too rough to permit its use to-day."

"Circle around the wreck, and see if we can discover her name," suggested Ned. "Perhaps there might be a dog or cat aboard, that we could rescue."

Slowly the *Comet* made a course around the wreck, and far enough away so that the wash of the sea would not ram her up against the abandoned vessel's sides. The boys could discover no

name on the derelict. Either it had been worn away by the action of the water, or that part of the ship where it should have appeared was ripped off. It seemed as if the wreck had been abandoned some time ago.

There was no sign of life aboard her, though Mr. Snodgrass was sure he could have at least discovered some stray bugs had he been given a chance to search, but it could not be done.

"Well, we'll get under way again, I guess," observed Jerry. "Perhaps to-morrow we'll have better luck."

"If we don't have some luck pretty soon, we'll have to go back, I suppose," remarked Ned gloomily.

"We have enough to eat for three weeks more," put in Bob.

"Yes, trust you for that, Chunky; but how about gasoline and oil?"

"Oh, we have enough for another week, anyhow, and perhaps longer," declared Jerry. "We're not going to give up the search yet, Ned. We'll find Mr. Jackson, and save your father's business."

"I hope so," murmured the merchant's son.

Professor Snodgrass had improved the time by getting out his net and dragging the sea for fish

specimens. He caught several varieties, but none that he wanted. The singing flying-fish was not among those in his net.

He was about to pull it in, when he saw a long, dark shadow moving slowly along on the port side of the *Comet*. The professor knew the shape at once.

"Here, boys!" he called. "See this monster shark!"

It was indeed a large specimen of the tiger of the seas, and as it moved slowly along, its horrid eyes seeking some prey, the boys could not repress a shudder of fear.

"If he ever got after us!" exclaimed Bob. "Ugh! Excuse me!"

"Same here," agreed Ned.

"There's another coming up," observed Jerry, pointing to a shadow farther out. "That's bigger than the first one."

Slowly another great form approached the Comet. Then the boys saw that there were two parts to the second shadow.

"It's a whale and her calf!" exclaimed the professor. "Boys, you are looking at a very rare sight. Make the most of it!"

"It will be a good thing if they don't make

mince-meat of us," remarked Ned grimly. "I'd hate to fall overboard now."

As he spoke, there was a sudden swirl in the water, a smother of foam, and then a tinge of red.

"Look!" cried Bob. "The shark has attacked the whale!"

"Not the whale, but the little calf!" yelled Jerry. "Why, the shark has bitten it almost in two pieces! We'd better get away from here, or there'll be a fight between those monsters and some waves that will swamp us!"

"That's right," agreed the professor. "The shark has killed the whale's calf. Now there will be trouble. There's nothing worse than a whale bereft of her young. Better go up, Jerry."

The lad ran to the pilot house to start the airpropellers. He had hardly reached the place, however, before a cry from his companions caused him to look back. The whale mother had fairly leaped from the water, falling back with a tremendous splash that raised a series of big waves which rocked the *Comet* to and fro.

"Get up! Get up!" begged Bob and Ned, running toward Jerry. "We'll be swamped!"

Jerry grasped the starting lever, but, for some

reason, the motor failed to respond. He shoved it back and forth and vibrated the spark adjuster. But the air-propellers refused to turn.

"Start the water-screw, and get as far off as we can," advised Ned.

"You do it, and I'll work at this lever," called Jerry.

As he spoke, he glanced back, and his cry of horror caused his companions to look where he pointed. Some distance off, and coming forward with increasing speed, was the whale, headed right for the floating motorship.

"She's going to attack us!" cried Ned. "She thinks our craft killed her calf, and she's going to ram us! Look out!"

Maddened by the loss of her offspring, the gigantic whale, as Ned had said, was about to attack the *Comet*, which was almost at the mercy of the leviathan, now that the air-propellers refused to operate. It was a critical moment for our heroes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SINGING FISH

On CAME the whale. Every moment seemed to increase the terrific speed of the maddened animal. Frantically the boys labored to get out of the way, but it was almost impossible until the air-propellers should start, and send the Comet skimming over the surface.

"Have you the water-screw going?" called

Jerry to Ned.

"Yes, and it's speeded up as high as it will go! Can't you get that motor started?"

"Can't seem to."

"Hurry! Hurry!" yelled Bob. "She'll ram us in another second or two!"

"We'll be destroyed if she does!" muttered Professor Snodgrass. "Oh, my precious collection! My valuable specimens! What shall I do?"

He rushed here and there, trying to gather all his boxes in one pile, and then to take them under his arms, but they continually fell out.

"It's no use!" cried Jerry, at length, "I can't

get this motor started. Get ready to jump, when the whale hits us! Grab life-preservers—make for the wreck and cling to that, for there'll be nothing left of the *Comet!*"

He abandoned his attempt at the air-propeller motor. The water-screw was sending the craft ahead at fairly good speed, but nothing to the progress made by the whale. She was almost upon them.

The boys made ready to jump, preparing to abandon their beloved craft, when a curious thing happened. In front of the oncoming whale was a big mound of green water, piled up by the enormous blunt head of the leviathan, just as in front of some blunt-nosed scow there is a wave. In this case, such was the speed of the animal, that the wave actually hid the big head from sight.

And it was this advancing wall of water which saved the lives of our friends and prevented the destruction of the motorship. For, so light and bouyant was the craft, that as the swell of the mound of water, which was in front of the whale, reached the *Comet*, she was lifted up like a chip on the crest of a billow.

Up and up she went, higher and higher on the swell, until in the excess of her fury, the whale brought about the very opposite to that which she

intended, for, instead of ramming the strange craft, she passed completely under it, harmlessly.

For a few seconds the boys and the professor could not realize their marvellous escape. Then they understood, and uttered a cheer of congratulation.

"She's passed under us!" cried Jerry.

"There she is, away over there!" shouted Bob, pointing to where the whale's progress could be observed by the mound of water.

"She'll be back as soon as she realizes her mistake," predicted Ned, and, even at that moment, the big creature began to turn, ready to return to the attack. But now, most unexpectedly, as Jerry rushed back to the starting lever of the main motor, the machine worked like a charm. There was a hum and a buzz, the propellers whirred around, and, skimming lightly over the surface of the ocean, the *Comet* suddenly arose, and shot into the air. And not a moment too soon, either, for, as her hydroplanes left the surface, dripping salty drops, the whale passed under again, one plane scraping her scale-covered back.

"Safe!" cried Jerry, and there was a breath of relief from all on board.

"Look!" yelled Ned, pointing down. "The whale and the shark are fighting!"

The two monsters of the deep were in a battle to the death, the whale seeking to kill the gigantic shark by a blow from her tail, and the sea-tiger trying to bite the leviathan as it had the baby whale. How the battle terminated, the boys could not determine, as their swiftly-moving craft took them beyond the scene. Once more they were sailing the air.

"And I didn't get my singing-fish, after all," sighed Mr. Snodgrass.

"We were lucky to get off with our lives," remarked Jerry. "But you'll have another chance for your prize, professor."

It soon got dark, and once more, with her searchlight aglow, the *Comet* sped on through the night. As before, the boys took turns looking for any strange lights which might indicate the balloon of which they were in search. But morning came with no sign of her.

It was a calm day, and, after travelling for some miles in the new direction, and seeing nothing, Jerry yielded to the requests of the scientist, and again let the craft float on the hydroplanes.

"For we are now over the region where I expect to find the singing-fish," said the professor, "and it would be a pity not to try to get it."

The boys thought so, too, and though they

were anxious to keep on with their quest, they could not refuse to give the professor a little time. He used his net for several hours, bringing up many strange creatures of the sea. Some of these he kept for himself, or for brother scientists, but the odd fish was not among them.

Jerry was about to tell Mr. Snodgrass that they could not spare more time, when the scientist, who had his net overboard, suddenly called:

"Oh, boys, I've got something big! Help me pull it in!" He was laboring at the rope, and evidently something was in the net, for there was a turmoil in the water, and the professor nearly went overboard.

"Quick! Help him!" yelled Jerry.

Bob and Ned sprang to the aid of the little man, and, by a strong pull, had the net on deck. It contained but one fish, a large one, that flopped violently about the deck, as if in protest at the treatment it had received.

But, at the sight of it, and of two fins that looked something like wings, the professor uttered a joyful shout.

"It's the singing-fish! The singing flying-fish!" he cried. "At last I have caught it! Listen!"

Hardly had he ceased speaking, than the queer

fish opened its mouth, and there came forth something between a whine and a low groan. It was anything but singing, but to the professor, this was evidently to be preferred to the sweetest music.

"Hear it sing! Hear it sing!" he cried. "You boys will be witness to it, for I'm afraid I can't keep so large a fish alive until we get home. But it sang; didn't it?"

"Yes; if you call that singing," remarked Bob in a low voice. "I've heard catfish do the same thing." In fact, the noise made by the odd fish was not unlike the sound a catfish, or bullhead, makes when caught. But the professor was satisfied.

"Help me get him into a tank of water, until I make some notes about him while he is still alive," the scientist begged, and the boys aided him. He was engaged in making copious notes about his prize, and Jerry was sending the *Comet* up into the air, when Bob, who was in the bow, looking upward, pointed at some object, and cried out:

"The balloon! The Manhattan! There she is, boys! There is what we've been looking for so long!"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE UNCONSCIOUS CREW

HARDLY able to believe or realize what Bob shouted, Jerry and Ned looked to where he pointed. There, in the air over their heads, perhaps a mile or two miles high, was a cigar-shaped, black object, floating along in a gentle wind. It looked like some big bird, winging its way over the ocean, but well the boys knew no birds would be so far from land.

"It's the balloon! The dirigible!" cried Bob

again.

"By Jove, Chunky!" yelled Ned, "I believe you're right! Speed up, Jerry! Can it be possible that we have really found her, and at last we will be able to see Mr. Jackson?"

"It's the balloon, all right," agreed Jerry slowly. "But whether it's the one we want or not, is another question."

"We'll soon settle that. I'll get the telescope," cried Ned.

He rushed into the main cabin, and came back

with the powerful glass. This he focused on the black object, which seemed to increase in size as the *Comet*, shooting upward, came nearer and nearer to it.

"Well?" asked Jerry anxiously.

"I can't make out any name on it," replied Ned, "but it's a dirigible balloon, all right, and it's hardly likely to be any other than the disabled Manhattan."

"Can you see any one on board?" asked Bob.

"No; I can't make out a soul. But they may be all inside the cabin."

"Or dead," thought Jerry grimly, but he did not say so. He would hope for the best.

"Let's get there as fast as we can!" proposed Ned eagerly. "They may need help very much."

"And they may be hungry!" added Bob. "I'll go get things ready for a meal." And this time his chums did not laugh at him. The occasion was too serious.

"We'd better be getting out the ropes and planks ready for a rescue," suggested Jerry.

"Are you really going to take off those people, if there are any in that balloon?" asked the professor, laying aside his note-books.

"That's the only thing to do," said Jerry. "We can't tow their disabled craft back, and the only

thing to do is to rescue them in mid-air. Ned, suppose you and Mr. Snodgrass get out the planks and ropes, while Bob attends to the food, and I'll get the *Comet* to the balloon as fast as the propellers will take her."

"Sure!" cried Ned eagerly. "Oh, to think that at last I've really got Mr. Jackson where he can't get away from me! I wish I could send dad a wireless message, telling him of our success!"

"Better wait until you get the signature," suggested Jerry, for, somehow, he did not like the fact that there came no signal from the floating balloon. If the crew on board was alive, he argued, they would naturally give some indication when they saw a craft coming to their rescue. But there was not the slightest sign of life aboard the *Manhattan*.

More and more swiftly through the air rushed the Comet. She was now so close that many details of the balloon could be made out, and the boys at once recognized it as the one they had seen leave the aviation grounds as they approached. It was the missing Manhattan beyond a doubt.

Ned and the professor were busy laying out the planks; Bob could be heard rattling about in the galley, and Jerry was doing his utmost to get the

top limit of speed from the motor. The Comet was now on a level with the balloon, and was rapidly approaching.

Setting the automatic steering apparatus, Jerry took up a telescope, and once more gazed through it at the balloon. As the craft came into focus, the youth uttered a strange cry.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ned, running toward his chum.

"Look," answered Jerry hoarsely, passing over the glass.

"They're all dead!" gasped the merchant's son, as he focused the telescope. "All dead!"

For the sight that came to him through the glass was that of a number of men lying in various positions in the after or open cabin of the *Manhattan*. Men were stretched out on the floor, some were humped over in chairs, and one could be seen half in and half out of an open door that led into the cabin.

"They're all dead!" cried Ned again. "We're too late!"

"Maybe they're only unconscious," suggested Jerry hopefully, though his heart misgave him. "We'll go closer and see."

Bob came from the galley to join his chums. As he reached them he sniffed the air suspiciously.

"What's that funny smell?" he asked. "It's like gas. Have you started our gas-machine, Jerry?"

"Our gas-machine? No, but—I have it!" he cried suddenly.

"What is it?" demanded Ned, catching a gleam of hope in Jerry's tone.

"It is gas! It's gas escaping from the disabled balloon! That's what has made the crew of the Manhattan unconscious. Perhaps they're not dead at all, but overcome by gas. We must keep on to the rescue!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE RESCUE—CONCLUSION

THE smell of escaping gas from the bag of the big balloon became more pronounced as the Comet approached. Eagerly the boys and Professor Snodgrass looked toward the disabled craft which was slowly drifting ahead of them, but which they were rapidly overhauling.

"We hadn't better go too close; had we?" suggested Bob.

"Why not?" asked Jerry. "We've got to get pretty close or we can't rescue them. The planks are about fifteen feet long, and we'll have to come within that distance, anyhow, to make a bridge from the *Manhattan* to our deck."

"I was thinking of the gas," went on the stout lad, who seemed to have some difficulty in breathing. "It might—we might be overcome," and he coughed raspingly.

"That's so," admitted Jerry, with a start. "I hadn't thought of that. Whew! But that vapor

is strong. It's different from what we use. I wonder—"

A fit of coughing interrupted him, and soon Ned and the professor were wheezing and sneezing, as the powerful fumes were wafted to them.

"We can't stand this!" gasped the tall lad. "No wonder these men are unconscious. It's a slim chance if they're alive, after breathing those fumes!"

A look of despair came over Ned's face. Was he, after all, to lose the last opportunity to aid his father? Was Mr. Jackson dead?

"We can't go any closer!" declared Jerry at length. "It will mean death or unconsciousness, if we do. I've got to halt the airship!"

Coughing and spluttering, he made his way to the pilot house, and brought the motor to a stop. Then, as the *Comet* could no longer sustain herself on her wings, being bereft of motion, she began to sink, until Jerry started the gas-machine, making a dirigible balloon of the craft. With the big bag inflated, she floated lazily in the air, about a quarter of a mile from the *Manhattan*. Both were being driven slowly onward by a light wind.

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Bob. Breathing was easier for them all now, as they were not so near the disabled balloon.

"That's the problem," declared Jerry. "We can't go any closer without being in danger ourselves, and we can't rescue those men until we get within ten or fifteen feet of them."

"Couldn't we wait until all the gas escaped from their bag, and then venture up?" asked Ned.

"By that time those men will be dead, if they are not lifeless already," answered Jerry solemnly.

It was a trying situation. To be within sight of the men they wanted to save, to be near Mr. Jackson, on whom so much depended, and yet not able to reach him and his companions, was tantalizing. Yet they all recognized the truth of what Jerry said. It would be death for them all to venture nearer.

Professor Snodgrass, who had been curiously sniffing the air, as though to determine the nature of the gas, suddenly gave an exclamation.

"Boys, I think I have it!" he cried eagerly. "I am not sure, but I think I know the composition of the gas used in the bag of that balloon. If I am right, I can easily manufacture, from the chemicals I have, something that will neutralize it."

"Will you do it?" cried Ned eagerly.

"I will, at once! Though I am not sure it will work. If it does, all that will be necessary to do will be to saturate a handkerchief with the solution I will make, tie the cloth over our mouth and nose, and then all the gas breathed through it will be harmless."

"That's just what we need!" exclaimed Jerry.

The professor lost no time in getting to work. He mixed up various chemicals in a flask, heated them, and then wet a handkerchief in the liquid. Binding the cloth over his nose and mouth, he went out to breathe the air, which was still slightly laden with the poisonous fumes. The professor inhaled deeply.

"Does it work?" asked Ned eagerly.

"I think it does," was the reply. "We will have to go nearer to make sure."

It did not take long for all to adjust the wet handkerchiefs over their mouths and noses. Jerry then started the propellers, and once more the Comet approached the Manhattan. Could they come close enough to make the rescue, and still be safe themselves? Each breath they drew would soon tell the story.

Anxiously they noted the effect.

"I can't smell or breathe any gas!" mumbled Ned, for the handkerchief interfered with speaking.

"Me, neither," added Ned.

"It's all right!" declared the professor. "We can go as close as we wish, but we can't stay long, for the chemical will soon evaporate. Work lively, boys!"

It was only a few minutes more before the Comet was close beside the disabled balloon. The latter was a large craft, and was floating easily along, her machinery silent. Silent, too, and motionless, were the five men who constituted the pilot and crew. In various attitudes they were stretched in the open cabin, as if they had struggled there for air. It could not yet be told whether they were dead or alive.

"Quick, now!" mumbled Jerry. "Run out the planks, and we'll cross over and carry the men on board here."

He skillfully put the Comet alongside of the other craft. There they were, high in the air over the ocean, yet almost like two vehicles on earth, or two boats floating on the surface of the water. Jerry shut off the propellers, letting the Comet drift at the same rate as did the other craft.



CARRIED THE UNCONSCIOUS MILLIONAIRE ACROSS THE NARROW PLANKS.



With a rope, Jerry next made the two balloons fast to each other, to prevent them from drifting apart. Then two planks were laid across from the after-deck of the *Comet* to that of the *Manhattan*. Quickly crossing on these, our heroes and the professor boarded the disabled airship.

"There's Mr. Jackson!" cried Mr. Snodgrass, indicating one of the unconscious men.

"We must rescue him first!" declared Ned, and no one disputed him. With the help of Jerry, the merchant's son carried the unconscious millionaire across the narrow planks, from one airship to the other, high above the ocean which rolled beneath them. It was a most marvellous rescue in mid-air!

"Now the rest!" called the professor. He and Bob took up another man, and carried him to safety. When Jerry and Ned returned for a third member of the crew, the tall lad, looking into the main, or closed cabin, noticed some sparks coming from one of the electrical machines connected with the wireless apparatus. It was run by a storage battery, and must have been left connected and turned on when the men were stricken down. A stream of vivid, violet-colored sparks were emanating from the contact points.

"By Jove, we must get away from here in a hurry!" cried the tall lad.

"Why?" asked Ned, pausing in the act of lifting the feet of an unconscious man.

"Those sparks!" gasped Jerry. "They may explode the gas any minute, and we'll be blown to atoms! Lively, Ned!"

Ned needed no urging. Rapidly he and Jerry once more crossed the plank in mid-air with the unfortunate man. On their next trip Jerry noticed that a blue light was playing about the machine whence the sparks came.

"She'll go up in about a minute more!" he gasped.

But two more men remained to be saved. These were quickly carried across the bridge in the air, and laid in the cabin of the *Comet*.

"Cast off!" yelled Jerry, beginning to cough again, for the deadly fumes were manifesting themselves through the chemically saturated hand-kerchiefs. "Cast off!"

It took but an instant to do it. The great propellers were set in motion, and the *Comet* rapidly glided away from the *Manhattan*. The boys looked back at her, as she floated in mid-air.

"We must see to those men!" directed Jerry, taking off the improvised mask, which was no longer needed. "Perhaps it is even now too late! Professor, will you help us?"

"Of course. I think I know how to revive them, if there is a spark of life left."

"Look!" yelled Bob, pointing to the Manhattan. A haze of flame surrounded the unfortunate craft.

"It's all up with her!" cried Jerry.

The next instant there came a terrific explosion, and the dirigible was scattered to the four winds, to fall in a shower of canvas, silk and broken machinery into the sea, there to disappear from sight forever.

"We got away just in time," spoke Ned in awed tones.

With the motor speeding her back across the ocean, over which she had so gallantly come a long distance, and with the automatic steering apparatus set to guide her, no attention need be paid to the *Comet* for some time. So the boys and the professor devoted their energies to reviving the men. That they were not dead was soon established, though they were very nearly so.

But Professor Snodgrass knew just what to do, and in about an hour, when some of the medicines they had brought had been administered, Mr. Tackson opened his eyes.

"Where are we? What happened? Is there any hope? Can you see any vessel that will save

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us?" he gasped. Evidently he thought himself still aboard his own craft.

"You are all right, Wescott!" said Mr. Snodgrass. "Don't you know me?"

"Uriah Snodgrass!" gasped the millionaire. "Well, of all things! How did you get aboard the Manhattan?"

"I didn't. It's you who are aboard here. You've been rescued! The *Manhattan* is no more!" And the scientist quickly explained what had happened.

Mr. Jackson rapidly recovered from the fumes of the gas, as did the members of the crew, and his friend, Mr. Watson, who had made the trip with him. Then the story of the rescue was told.

In turn Mr. Jackson related how, after ascending to a great height soon after leaving the aviation grounds, his craft was caught in the hurricane and driven out to sea. Then the propelling machinery broke, and they could only drift about at the mercy of the wind. For days they were driven onward, thinking each hour would be their last. They tried to signal for help from steamers passing below them, but could not, as their wireless was soon out of order, and they were too high up to make any other means effective.

They dared not descend, for fear of being drowned. Besides, to go down, they would have had to let the gas escape, and they had no means of making more. To keep afloat was their only hope, and they did, trusting to be rescued some time. Then they were blown out of the steamship lane, and did not know what to do.

Finally, when they had given up hope, and were going to descend, and try to make some sort of a raft to float on, there came a leak in the gas-bag, and, one by one, they became unconscious. A little longer and they would have been dead. But the *Comet* came along in time.

"Well, I certainly am glad to see you again, professor; and also your young friends," said Mr. Jackson heartily, when he was feeling somewhat stronger.

"And I'm glad to see you," spoke Ned.

"Yes, my friend here has a request to make of you," went on Mr. Snodgrass, "and, if possible, I wish you would grant it. He has had quite a chase after you."

"I'd do most anything for you, Uriah," declared the millionaire, with a smile, "for I haven't forgotten the service you did me."

"Then save Ned's father from financial ruin,"

was the request, and Ned at once brought out his papers, and made a plea for the rescue of his parent's business. It did not take Mr. Jackson a moment to make up his mind.

"Of course I'll help Mr. Slade," he said; "not only for his own sake, but because of his plucky son and his chums, and also to beat that gang of men who want to ruin him. Here, I'll sign at once, and you can be a witness, Uriah." There was the scratching of a pen, and Ned knew that his father's troubles were practically over.

Rapidly the Comet sped on her way, being headed toward New York. Every hour the rescued ones recovered their strength, and soon all traces of the poisonous gas had vanished. Ned was eager to telegraph the good news to his father, and Jerry was soon able to get into wireless communication with a steamer below them. The operator, though much surprised to get a message out of the air, readily promised to relay it to New York and Cresville, as his apparatus had a wider range than that of the Comet.

"Well, I never expected to come so far over the ocean," remarked Jerry the next day, when they were nearing the coast. "Our hydroplanes did us good service." "They're great," commented Mr. Jackson. "I'm going to put them on the next air-craft I make."

"Only for them I'd never have my singing-fish," said Mr. Snodgrass, who had made copious notes about his prize. It had died, but he had preserved it. "It is the most wonderful specimen I ever caught," he declared.

However, he soon afterward secured one that was even stranger, when, in company with our heroes, he went on another voyage with them. The details of this will be found in the next volume of this Series, to be called "The Motor Boys on the Wing; or, Seeking the Airship Treasure."

"I wonder how it will seem to be on solid ground again?" asked Mr. Watson of Mr. Jackson, when Jerry announced the next day that they were within sight of New York.

"So good that I'm not going to leave it again in a hurry," announced the millionaire. "I'm done with ballooning for the present, though I'm not going to give it up altogether."

They flew over New York, to the great astonishment of the millions of that great city, and on to the aviation ground, where a descent was made. There our heroes were royally received, and the story of the marvellous rescue told over and over again. The matter of the claim of Mr. Muggins was adjusted, his lawyer advising him to accept one hundred dollars, which he reluctantly did, and the incident was closed.

"Come on, let's hurry home," urged Ned, who was anxious to give his father the valuable paper. Mr. Jackson promised all the financial aid that Mr. Slade needed, and said he would be glad to see the merchant get the better of his financial enemies.

And Mr. Slade did so. Thanks to the efforts of Ned and his chums, the business was saved by Mr. Jackson's timely help, which was secured only after such an exciting chase.

Cresville warmly welcomed the boys, who arrived in their motorship, and Andy Rush was so excited that he could only splutter for nearly half a day, no one being able to understand what he said.

"It was great! Great!" he finally managed to say, over and over again.

"Would you undertake it another time, Jerry?" asked Ned one evening, when they were discussing the recent happenings.

"Oh, I don't know. I think I would. It was dangerous, but we came out of it all right."

"It's a good thing I stocked up with plenty of; provisions," declared Bob, and his two chums laughed. And now, we will leave the Motor Boyst for a while, and say good-by.

THE END

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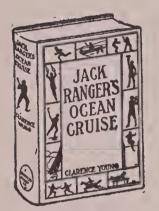
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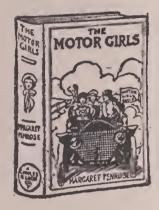
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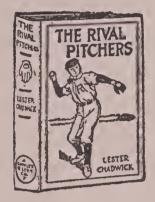
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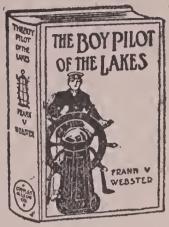
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